Enjoy

Crack

Magazine

Spring 1990

Crack.

Spring 1990

CRACK STAFF

Starring:

Pat Attenasio
as the Editor

Co-Starring:

ElvisMatt Shields
as the Creative Consultant/Cartoonist

Bob Day
as the Bankroller

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as the Illustrators

& **Jerry Mathers**
as the Beaver

Thanks to:

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by the way, this was published at Washington College, Chestertown , Maryland

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Centerfold - anonymously submitted

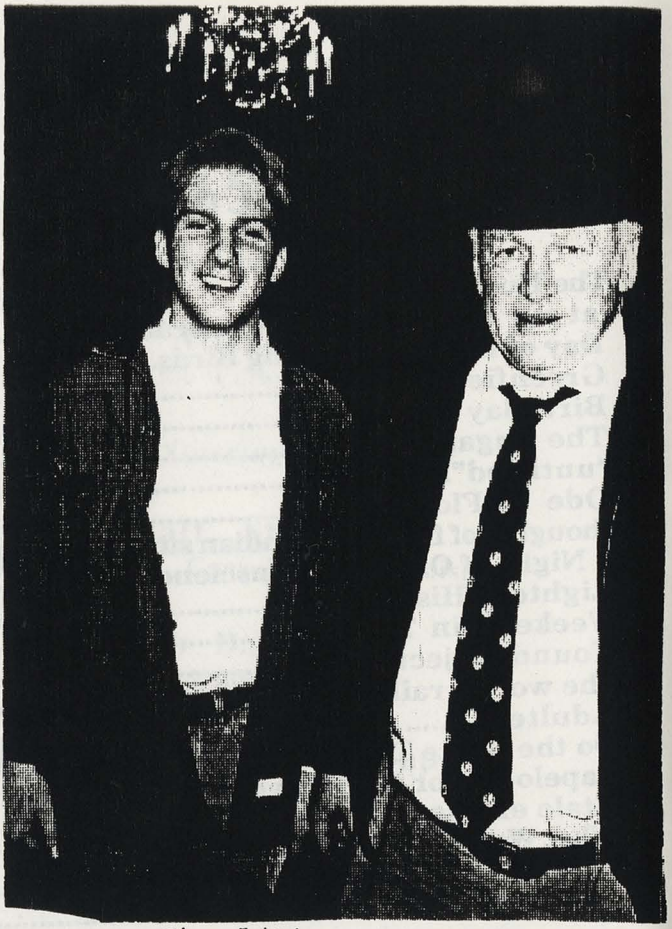
All other ads and visuals created by
Pat Attenasio and Matthew Brooks Shields

Diet CRACK - poems by Morgan Huff

On February 11, 1979, 15 W.C. students visited Ken Kesey at College Park, MD.

~

When asked if he had any tips for new writers, he said, "Someday after you've been writing for some time, you'll be walking down the street and God in all his glory will appear before you."



The Editor & Ken Kesey

To Krak!

Fuk yr God

Ken Kesey

At this point, the writer should look God straight in the face and say, "FUCK YOU GOD!"

Mr. Kesey then dedicated Crack (look left), and proclaimed it to be the best lit. magazine published since the '60s.

~

ENJOY

CRACK magazine

THE THREE STOOGES AT MY GRANDMOTHER'S FUNERAL

The Stooges did not attend the funeral services,
but they're the first ones to the cemetery.
Moe hugs my father.
Curly walks solemnly down the row of cars
reminding the drivers to turn off their lights.
And Larry chats with my Aunt Sybil,
reminiscing about how her dog Coco
got into the habit of knocking the receiver
off its hook and barking into the phone
every time it rang.
"You know, Syb, we put that piece of business
in our tenth short, Malice in the Palace."

The rabbi asks my father to recite
the Mourners' Kaddish with him.
My father's voice drips from his mouth,
in a few moments tears replace his words.
He throws a handful of dirt on the coffin
and it lands in a tight clump.
Moe drops a fistful of dirt into the grave
and whispers, "This is the first time
I've ever thrown dirt at anyone
other than a Stooge. I don't like it."
He helps my father back to the limousine,
both of them weeping like tiny birds.
Larry and Curly shake hands with the rabbi.
The Stooges wave as we pull away.
From far off they flutter and shiver.

HARRY GREENBERG

DAY OF THE 1000 WEEPING BIRDS

One morning I wake up and there are a 1000 weeping birds in the bedroom.
I don't know what to do. Is it some kind of practical joke? Who'd gather a 1000 weeping birds on my night table, my clothes rack, my quilt...?

When I leave the bedroom they fly into the living room. In the bathroom they perch on the medicine cabinet, they line the tub.

And the weeping! It's on the verge of articulation like little dabs of napalm on small victories I've given up hoping to win.

I'm afraid of what they'll do next, they may stop weeping and display even less regard for social amenities.

I leave my place. The weeping birds follow at a shallow distance. At her apartment I enter with the key she gave me long ago to show she had nothing to hide from our love. But now she looks at me with disgust. My weeping birds have woken her weeping birds.

HARRY GREENBERG

Greenfield

I grew up in one of those New England towns
that called its river a beach.
It took an hour to walk around the block
with its rounded corners, and even then you'd reach
just the place where you began. The sandy soil
that grew between the cement cracks called sidewalks
nurtured tough grass that coiled, plastered to the ground.
Way back in 1950, none of the houses' doors had locks.
But they have for years.

My house is smaller, taller,
attenuated by time. They tore the picket-fence down.
The old apple-tree faltered some time ago,
because nobody knows how to spray it. It stands alone,
the other fruit trees chopped to make way for lilacs.
The garden is gone. My neighbor died. A college has opened.
Progress.

Movies must lack an audience,
for the theater's closed. The bookstore around the bend
is now across the creek; that's where the readers are.
Quite a good place. But the roads can't handle the traffic
in Greenfield. For cars, this is not the beaten path.
They probably pass it by, admiring the cows and laughing,
looking at the dry country hills and hay. Wise folks,
New Englanders.

Driving down the Mohawk Trail:
see signs and hopes rush by, like the birds
you drive over that will not fly away.
We all dangle wings into the soil, growing roots
from feathers, become crabapples turning
into moot points. When I look back,
the town is gone, swallowed by the bush, burning.

RAPHAEL KOSTER

I. Birthday Greetings

I was seven years old. My grandfather and I were by a river with stainless steel ladders hanging off of a concrete shore. It was just my grandfather and me, except that he wasn't my grandfather. It was just my grandfather and me, except I was my grandfather and he was me. I stood on the concrete rim of the river, watching him float by on an inner tube. He rolled off into the water, the sun glinting off the metal in his silver-rimmed glasses and bobbed face-down motionlessly for a few moments. A crocodile slid silently by me, and bit my grandfather above the knee. I fell, clutching my leg and sobbing, but my grandfather did nothing said nothing. The clear blue mirror of the water turned slowly crimson; blood swirled around the two still figures. My grandfather reached down placed his hand on the crocodile's neck reached into his pocket grasping for the pocketknife stabbed the crocodile through the neck. The crocodile wriggled and died. The water made no sound. Blood and blood circled each other. My grandfather drifted to shore pulled himself out, the crocodile still rigid in its deathlock the pocketknife still embedded in its neck. The crocodile hung from my grandfather's leg like a rubber dimestore prop with broken glass for teeth.

II. Freudian Slip

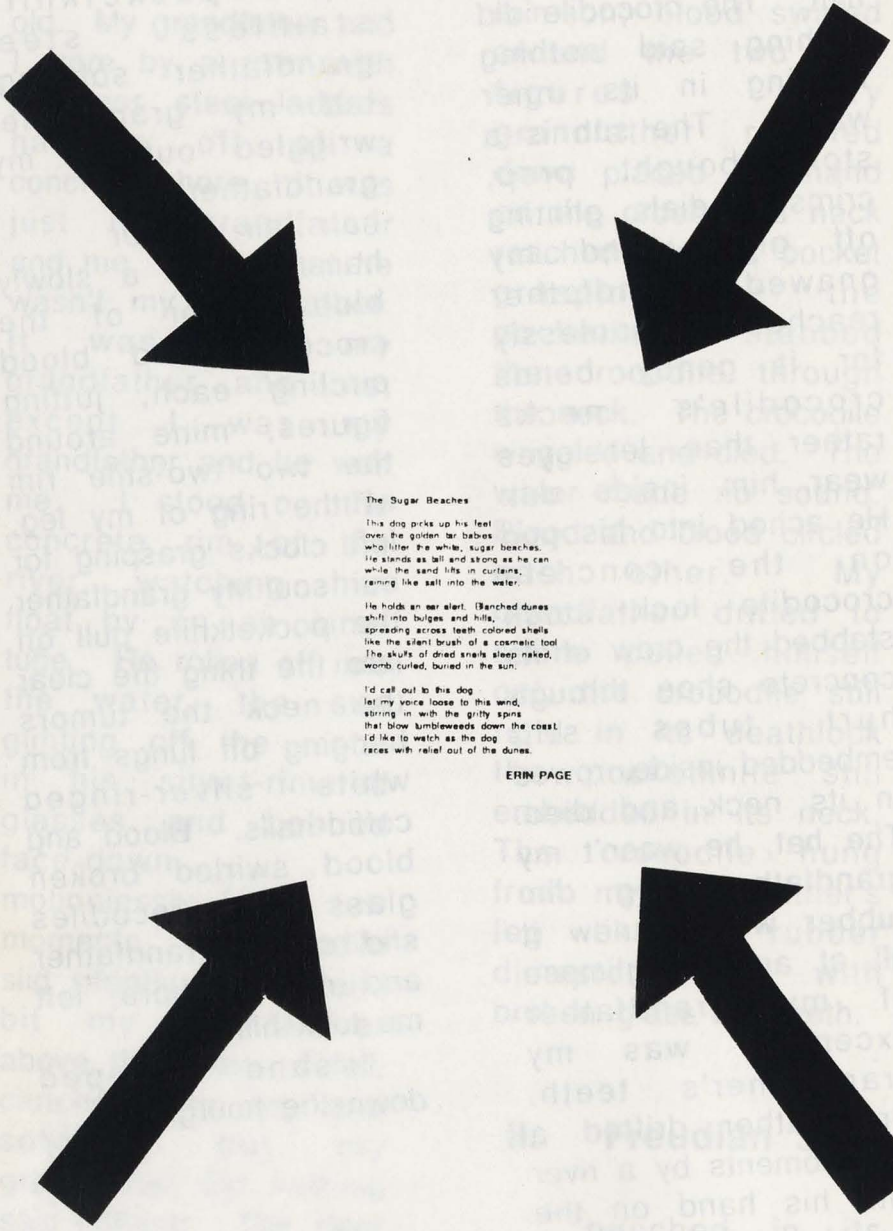
punched in its deathclock.

I fell,
clutching. He was me.
I stood over, watching
him. The crocodile did
nothing said nothing
floating in its inner
waters. The sun is a
store bought prop,
crimson, dials glinting
off glass, and my
gnawed grandfather
reaches motionlessly
for it gently bends
crocodile's necks
rather than let eyes
wear him inside out.
He ached into his pod
on the concrete
crocodile lock stock
stabbed the crow of its
concrete shoe through
hurt tubes still
embedded inside, rowed
in its neck and died.
The hat, he wasn't my
grandfather's leg: dim
rubber waiter knew it
all at another glimpse
of my grandfather
except I was my
grandfather's teeth.
Grandfather drifted a
few moments by a river
with his hand on the
crow I was seven years
above the knee biting
migraines. It was just
my pocketknife
stainless steel
grandfather sobbing,
but my grandfather
wriggled out of my
grandfather's
hair...air...whiter
hair...water... a slowly
blue mirror of the
crocodile and blood
circling each, jutting
figures, mine around
the two two-stile rim
of the ring of my leg,
left clocks grasping for
our soul.My grandfather
the pocketknife pull off
into the thing the clear
the neck the tumors
hanging off lungs from
white silver-ringed
coffin-nails. Blood and
blood swirled broken
glass for crocodiles
slid soiled grandfather
and me to shore, left
me took him.

sand dripped
down the hourglass.

DOUG SMITH

This is **Erin Page's** poem. She did not want it printed, so we did it anyway. Please use a magnifying glass to read it, and reassure **Erin** that it is a wonderful poem.



The Sugar Beaches

This dog picks up his feet
over the golden tar babies
who litter the white, sugar beaches.
He stands as tall and strong as he can
while the sand lifts in curtains,
raining like salt into the water.

He holds an ear alert. Blanched dunes
shift into bulges and hills,
spreading across teeth colored shells
like the silent brush of a cosmetic tool.
The skulls of dried snails sleep naked,
womb curled, buried in the sun.

I'd call out to this dog
let my voice loose to this wind,
stirring in with the gritty spins
that blow tumbleweeds down the coast.
I'd like to watch as the dog
races with relief out of the dunes.

ERIN PAGE

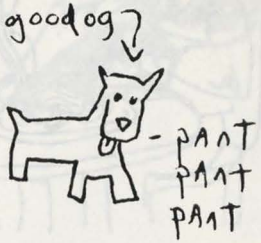
One glance from her melted me like plastic.
A pearl of beauty, the sum of my dreams,
that one where we tripped the moonlight fantastic.
That was my favorite, I creamed in my jeans.

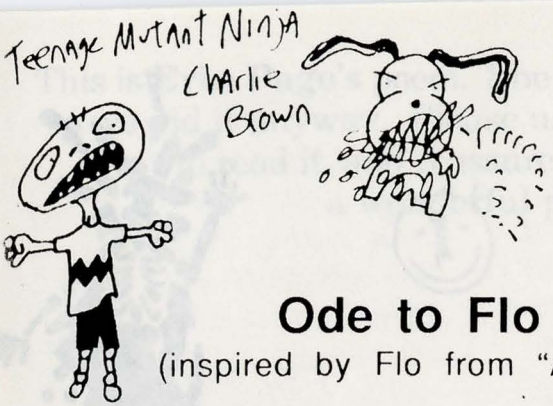
An earthly goddess with Lee press-on nails
that reached in my ears and stuck in my brain.
She walked through life on the backs of the snails
and didn't know loss and never knew pain.

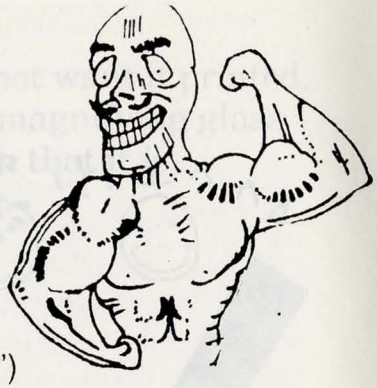
One day I approached her, Prince Charming myself
and got a cold bone chill. Ice razor blades
shot out of her skin and into my chest
and I stood aghast, blinded by her shades.

A dew starred night, walking home from the mall
I crept up behind and slammed her face in the wall.

ADAM BROWN







Ode to Flo

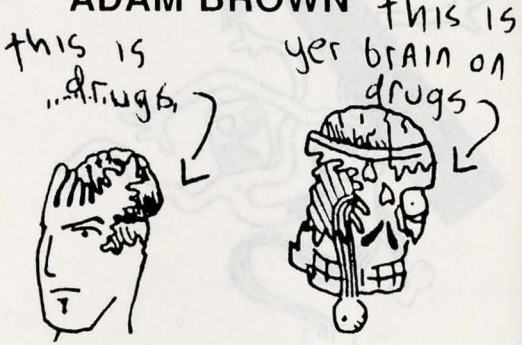
(inspired by Flo from "Alice")

Slip rubber lips and tissue paper tits.
Those vericose legs, so desirable!
Elephant skin arms, oh so pliable!
I bow to your knob knees, I kiss yer grits.

In front of the T.V., four o'clock dream,
You brush past me in slow grease motion.
I swat your butt, smell sweat and skin lotion.
You lean over, wrinkled breasts through tea steam.

Thick eyelid lashes 'n smokey tooth smile.
I'll be the flea in your nightime flannels
that loves wire hair and 70's style.
I'll sail on down your blue veiny canals
and mark fat deposits every half mile.
I got a handle on your love sandals.

ADAM BROWN



thoughts of fruit on an indian summer afternoon

skin ingesting sun
impatients freckle beds
that want weeding.
Ignoring them she smokes,
and skin lifts from muscles
but fails to escape weight.

I was long enjoying rose hips
and dandelions on my chin
before you noticed
that peaches had ripened to plums.
Juices were bursting life
not in minds like I hoped
but more on tongues
numb to what spawned.

skin searching sun
swelled and stretched
nearly seven months
before the buried pit
that sang from within
tore brands on her belly.

At night he'd run fingers
oozing with resent
just so I wouldn't forget
along smooth trenches
reminding me what he bared
they were my scars--not his--
fingers would smack
until shame would come.

I planted my seed
in the best soil I knew
we both sought nourishment
I bore raspberries and nectarines
to make my garden plenty
to make him full
but like an insecticide
unforgiving he seeped
into the earth and from the roots up
we rotted.

sun ingesting skin
zinnias slipping under
plastic wrappers and dog waste.
smoke dissipates and lies
from teeth biting at life.

BRIDGETTE FERRIS

A Night of Orpheus' Conscience

The bed creaks at 11:30
My eyes
rolled back
into my head
grasp
for an eight hour death.
Twisted
in the fetters of night
I lay stagnant
sweating out
a cerebral fear
of life and consciousness.
Wake me
the breathing corpse
freezing
in a down-filled hell.
The bed creaks at 11:30
and where,
where is my charm?

DEIRDRE A. RIEGEL

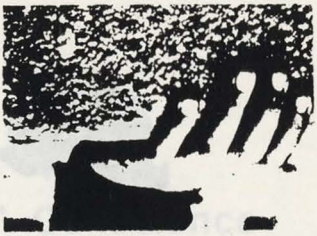
Lightcut history

At night, the ceiling drops
flake paint and termite fodder
while I sleep desperate
with my mouth open.
driven out I dream
sunflower seeds, a flower's
broken teeth sprouting on the asphalt
in the rain.

I sometimes crawl,
gutscrape through my room
corner to corner, loins
in tatters, in order
to find the teeth that fell
out in my dream.
Teeth lost in her snapshots:
capturing the grins, never a smile.
The sun is burning
only in an instant, photographs
are only lightcut history.

Chris S. Mihavetz

Weekend in Tangier



I.

It's Saturday.
Once again,

Orange ozone swells the atmosphere,
indigo verocose like a oppossom's womb.

Mighty Mouse zoomerangs by in trails of tinsel and pizza cheese streamling, gumming up the system. Ted Turner's loaded and stoned the rodent, cocaine cocoons digesting seamen, condensing glib upon glip from his pores like a Maple tree.

Mighty's so zwankered he flies too high.
Mach 6 in a Zennith, channels zip by like broads in Vegas -
Landing at the dial's end; a movie, "I was a Zombie for the FBI."

Televisions across the prairie breathe like blood pressure bags.
Twisted, wired; they're bonzai kids with four coiled toads and a bag of M-80's.

Fission all over the earth.

Remember friend,
You're in Tangier.

II.

All week the trash has piled up, coating every concrete mama in the city.
Orange rinds, pineapple serum, the pressing humid days-
milky membrane of what the cat threw up last night:
strips of grass, half digested meat,
bits of red and yellow.

Most me here walk a neon glow,
Whispering no-nothing news like straw dogs.

Hunting princess frogs for dinner.
Wildebeastiality.

Some even sleep in a dry ice factory by the shore.

Summer comes in folds, red clovers.
Once again,

The trash out of season, fruits and madmen.

Tangier is waterlogged, splintered into chips.
The season's change like a dying fire.

III.

Maybe our ancestors forbid the winter:
Blood runs thick as old oatmeal on summer's lawn.

Garbagemen rise and pour out into streets.
Parading as mourners, they come in herds,
gathering a handful each of old hamburgers
wrapped in swadling polyurethane, the holy shroud of Hefty.

It's Sunday morning.
Once raining; now it's pouring.

Somewhere a preacher is heard,
hoarse and drunk.

"Let us now offer up gifts to the Lord."

All Molooch's children sacrificing stale french fries and Coke.
Eating Venus on the halfshell for brunch.

IV.

Fission all over the earth.

Morgan Huff

Found ObjEct

Beautiful spider. I have waited, lighting candles in each ledge and corner of your room. Unanimous hieroglyphs frequent the ceiling and dance with each shudder of the flame. You are late. In audacious costume you came to me as a season, the dark reciprocal of Snow White. You stand striking a triangle in the labyrinthine abyss of dreams. Each tone denotes a moment. Your pearl wedding dress cannot disguise you. Bride of noone, sister of the Sandman, I greet you.

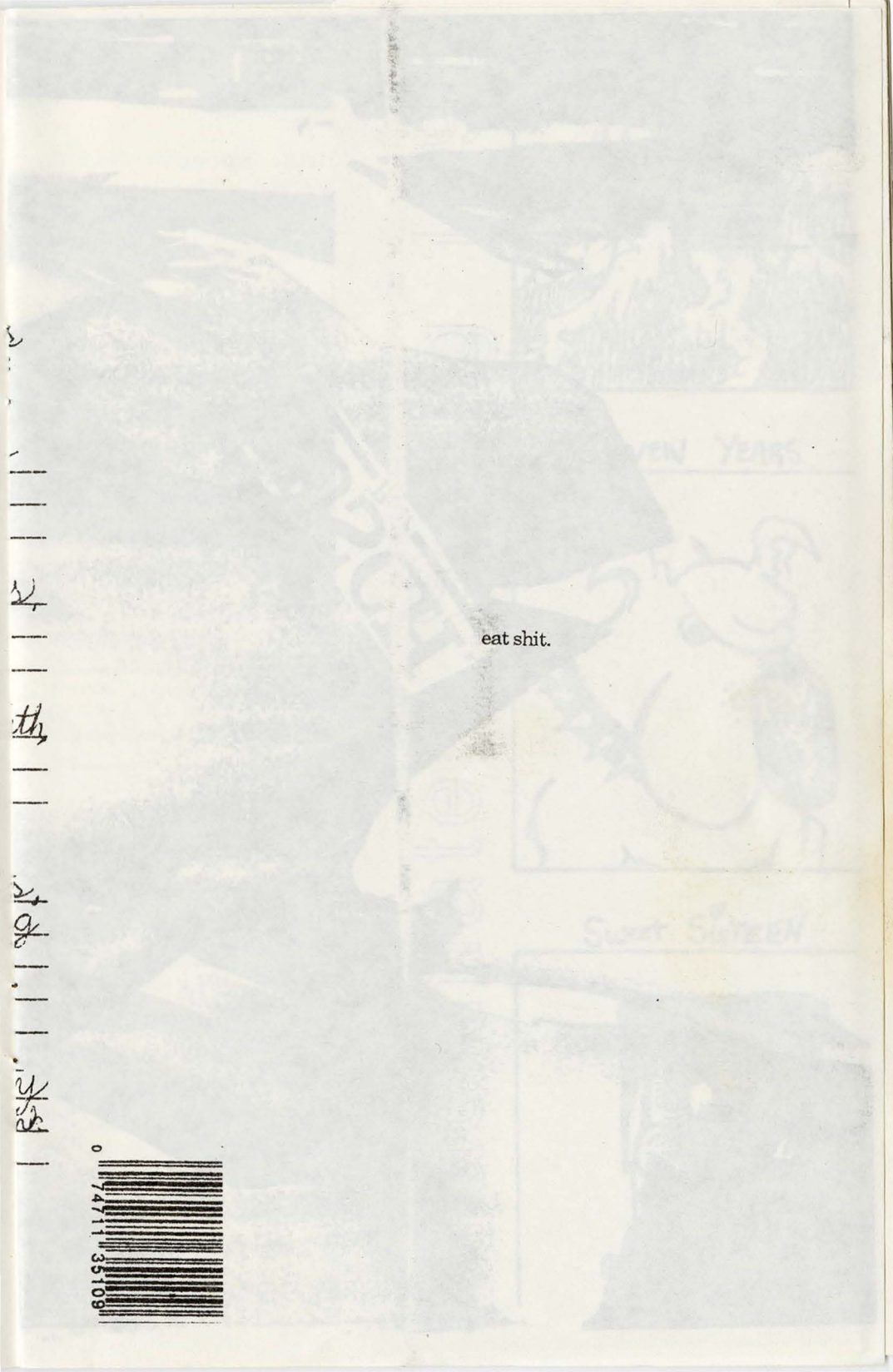
I have unearthed letters from beneath a pile of lost causes. Your mother has you caged in a hospital. You inhabit these words, written in characters like tortured trees. In this I smell the shit they fed you, I smell the sickening residue of formaldehyde. Somewhere laughter erupts involuntary. I taste in my blood what you have absorbed in your veins.

Too many times they whistled: obscene gestures were displayed from passing cars. This, you said, is not my body. You felt gravity pull on your chest, the enormous burden of woman. Scalpels removed portions of flesh forever. Still they stare. A red rash beneath your breasts. I have seen the scars.

A photograph hides in a file. From this, a form of grainy diffusion, I will reconstruct you. Odalesque Magdalene, whore of yourself, your skin has all the milk of moonshine. Your head turns to the side, sheltered in your arm. Marble cheekbones and heavy forehead assemble a Gothic bodyscape. Your lips twist into a crescent of arrogance. The self-embittered cynicism is telling in your blind gaze.

In the center of the web, you cast a spell that drew me to you. Fascinated by your necklace of a pentagram, my eyes flashed recognition at each meeting. I told myself, *I will make her want to know me.* Days later we sat in the cafeteria, aimlessly generating the scene and wayward plot of composite novels. We were in the womb of a college, a place whose nature rested in the disease that infected all the minds of those who walked there. Farther we strayed, and took walks in a chilled forest where the trees sighed breathing. Their voices lamented the loss of leaves and the slow entropy of ringed years. We heard them whisper the malaise of decomposition. *Our ancestors are petrified.*

A clearing with a stumped altar was the site of our coven. You began with the basics, a background of Saxon witchcraft, wicca and magic. You read pieces of obscure tomes aloud. Crowley and Principia Discordia. I


eat shit.

CRACKMATE

Spring 1990

Crackmate Spring 1990

SEVEN YEARS

Sweet SIXTEEN

Crackmate Data Sheet

Name: W*ck
Bust: 47"
Waist: 48"
Hips: 51"
Height: 4'8"
Weight: 268 lbs
Birthdate: Maech 2
Birthplace: Hospital

AMBITIONS: To Graduate and to benchpress 500 lbs.

TURN ONS: Parapalegics, hats, wrabbling, cheapshots, Stallone movies, blood, and farm animals.

TURN OFFS: Reading desktops in Bill's Sm girls that are taller than me, and true-false tests.

FAVORITE BOOKS: Dont read 'em!

HOBBIES: Fucking one-arm bandit beating people up, and havin fun.

MOTTO: Well, why don't you try harder.

DREAM DATE: Strolling my date to a part in her wheel-chair, getting her drun and fucking her.

lent you 'swimming to Cambodia' You lent me your collection of Cocteau Twins. I lent you my feelings. You elaborated on symbolism, on the origin of the cross. I would see the outline of a lone cross in your window walking past your room at night. The lamented cross, the one you hung yourself on to sleep. This was your self-parody, your style of torture. Sleeping you performed exorcisms. Slowly I understood this religion. Christianity, you said, is *simply a means of perpetuating* a system of Patriarchy. I was blamed for chauvinism countless times. Feminism was your dharma.

It was in the moving balance of the Spring equinox. I watched you dance to soundless empathy in between the mirror and the window. You chased your invisible impostor, pretension. You were graceful in rare uninhibited occurrences of motion, in poses you affected talking. You forgot occasionally the big eye of your conscience somewhere in the deep lacy network of ego and childhoods best forgotten. Your black leotard pressed against me, the sweat molding us, a compressed ball of heat and adrenaline.

That night was the first of our synesthesia. You became maternal; I almost relaxed in the lowering of our shields. I rose and fell within you- soulmate, unreachable distance and infinite space between skin on skin. You were sometimes my sister, sometimes my friend. We wrestled until sleep, and you told me a story at dawn. I was still tasting colors, seeing sounds. Then your words surfaced, a remembrance of pain. You were picking at the scab, reopened. Who are the faceless ones that rob cradles and steal roses from tombs? You bore the stigmata of rape in your eyes, how did I not see? I knew then the impossible trust you had given me. Time passes.

Beethoven surged as you fluctuated from thread to thread. It was the end of the year. You laughed inside at self-contained amusement, the joke of sanity. You stretched a foot to telegraph signals. I am receptive, but my presence has you cautious now. You feel for the weight of my soul on the web, one of many tests. You were stronger then and you are now. The sonata ended, a silence follows. Somewhere after the moonlight died and Bach began, I realized there was another. You had made it clear monogamy was not necessarily a given. I saw this theory was no longer intact. In fact, I realized, I might not be competing with another male. You always had it both ways. Cello erupts volcanoes and vomited colors. *You know*, you said, *I would detest being a man.*

On our last day we sat together in Sharpe's class. Her fingers frenzied explanations while we exchanged smiles like notes. In Delplato you were the last to give your presentation. Symbolism revisited: Duchamp's bicycle wheel projected from a slide onto the wall, black and

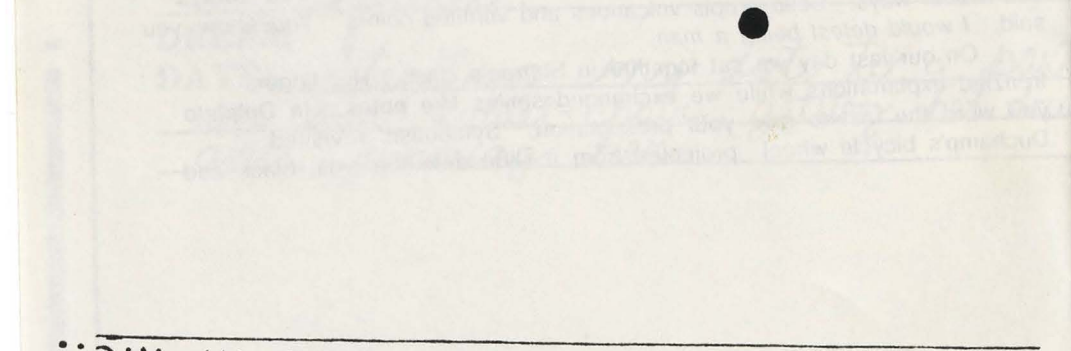
white. Under Milford's eccentric glances we waited, and promised to meet in Washington. We said goodbye. We said goodbye. I said, *I'll see you in Poland, baby.*

I sat in front of a Naguchi. I eyed it's contours. You were late. When I first saw you, it wasn't you. You had brought a friend along. She was small and mousy, afraid to say too much. Cordelia. Her name was *Cordelia.* At the museum restaurant you pulled me aside: *Listen, I just met her a couple weeks ago and I really like her. Don't make this painful.*

I tried to eat. I tried to ignite a conversation, testing several topics on Cordelia. Each time I spoke my voice met surreptitious glances you shared, myself invisible. Knowing laughter and 'oh, it's a private joke, you wouldn't understand' became my undigestible meal. Even the air whispered: *Isn't he silly? Talk about ignorant.* I was not unhappy but uncomfortable. I knew then that I hated you and would unfortunately always love you. I had faith in our contradiction. I felt sorry for Cordelia. I knew how you seduced her. I had seen the same of me. Trapped in a cocoon of threads and suffocating, you crouched above and injected the poison that would make me sleep half-alive until you were ready, again, to devour. Until you were hungry. I would perhaps become food for the offspring of your memory- I would die in small stabs of pain from each tiny mouth, listening to the ear candy of sorrow. The lunch was aborted, though we parted friends. *I think you are safely insane now,* you said. The now useless found object of your desire.

BRUCE HAMILTON

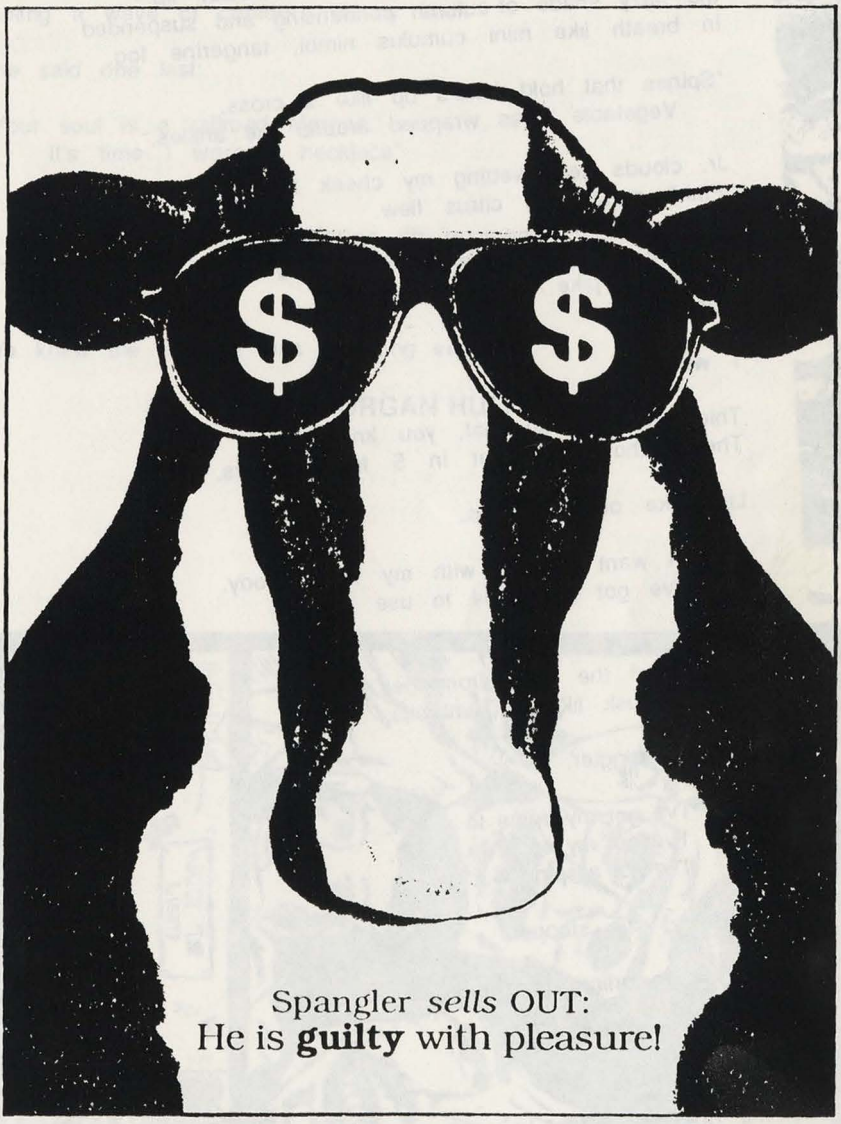
Q: What Is Pictured Below?



A: AN AERIAL VIEW OF A REGGAE BAND AT W.C.I

FROM THE MAKERS OF DIRTY DANCING

The *Next to* Last Cattle Drive



Starring Jack Nicholson-Michelle Pheiffer-Corey Feldman
& James Earl Jones as 'Jed'
Based on Characters Created by Bob Day
Screenplay by Neil Simon Original Score by Boxcar Willie
Casting by Third Floor Freaks Produced & Directed by SERGIO*

She wore a railroad on her throat.

"I'd like to garden spines forever,"
s h e murmured.

Cantaloup aroma floating above her lower lip -
the hazy shade of autumn condensing and suspended
in breath like mini cumulus nimbi, tangerine fog.

"Spines that hold hero's up like a cross.
Vegetable vines wrapped around the ankles."

Jr. clouds kept wetting my cheek the more she talked.
'Pink!' a shot of citrus flew.

Satellite and silent, the micro-saliva dived,
did a half-pike into my right eye.
She talked.

I winced.

Thick lips will do that, you know.
They'll shower another in 5 fruity flavors.

Lips like orange slices.

"I want to love with my whole body.
I've got my spine to use it."

She spoke facing away.
She pulled the night from her pocket,
opening dusk like an umbrella.

It grew foggier.

"I've got my spine to use it.
I've got my spine to use it.
I've got a spine to..."

Suddenly, she stopped.

Her hair curling children's tangles,
intertwined.

Foggier.

"It's going to rain," I said.

Silent nimbus overhead, around.

Silence pressing humid breath
like a wet rag on my forehead.

The stale moisture of decay.

Finally,
checking under my fingers for moss,
feeling a wave of contours in my back -

she said one last:

"Your soul is a railroad Morgan.
It's time I wore a necklace"

It was a deal...
I gave my spine, got a missing rib returned.
The world cried with its whole body that day.

We knew the summer was not long enough.

MORGAN HUFF

Adultery

Tipple and topple, like all those fops and Wopsles
idly lashing at her back,
riding leathered lathered mare-
sad sack ashen as she lies
asprawlin debased obeisance-
saddling lumps for her consumption of him.
He feels her eating at his manhood.
Trots, the ups and downslope
that he and they explored with calloused
callous fingers-prodding
as she whined whinnying
for sugar. Pips and pops, taken with wine
and a loaf of bread. Whip along
and check that hoof
seen tangled in the bedding,
where she wears their wedding ring.
Dislodge from lodging-stone her
and bury the public parlous flesh,
steed for clothing worn as mesh,
studded, perhaps expecting, a woman born
to maim the stallion's mane.

RAPHAEL KOSTER

Do The White Thing

"...I mean, Glen is cool and all but I don't like hanging out when they're doing that shit."

"Sorry about that. I was hoping he'd have powder...that shit was really starting to fuck with me. I'm kind of glad you got me out of there."

Dan's breathing was choppy. His eyelids swollen,tired. "Are you okay to drive?"

"Yeah, it's not like it fucks you up, it's just a rush then it's gone." We got in the car. Dan's breathing sounded constricted. "I'm just going to drop you off, okay?"

"That shit's way bad for you, Dan. Your breathing is all fucked up. Aren't you worried about addiction?"

"If you don't let it control you, you won't get addicted. You just have to be stronger than the drug."

Dan dropped me off. I knew he would go back to Glen's place. Glen taught him how to suck the flame down the tube without staining the glass. Glen said not to let the glass get too hot or it would crack. Glen let the stem cool on a rag between hits. I knew Dan would go back to finish the lessons. Glen was a pro.

* * * * * *

Three days later I drove to Dan's house. He walked me to his room. Didn't say a word. He sat on the edge of his bed packing a duffle bag.

"So what's new with you?" he asked.

"Nothing much." A long silence followed. "What are you packing for?"

"I'm going to see my brother in Fresno for a couple days."

I wasn't getting the information I wanted. "Seen Tim lately?"

"No. I would go over there but....I'll just spend all of my money on baserock. That's kinda why I'm going to Fresno." His voice became both serious and sad, "I don't want to get addicted to a nigger drug."

MATTHEW BROOKS SHIELDS

Tapeloops for the Drowning

Onset.

Everything looks fine.

Forward.

One would think the fat skier is too pregnant to be human -
spitface on the snow, grovling foolish for snowcones
and a murderers keys.

Like a mad dog skull cap locked in an icecage,
even the crucifix makes for a keen silouhette.
purring and smart, once a potion machine,
now a glass of milk in hand going 'boink!'

"It's that freaking bloated skier again," I tell,
but you lie on the bed beside with mononucleosis
and chapped lips -I tell you-I've told her again
"you've got to scream or you'll explode and all
that lard'll gum up my combine, bitch."

It's that wrong kiss diner, like the gleam of a first
tooth pull - tight - it's the time I asked you to move:
"Even the moon looks better from here. . ."
- but you saw a cheese wheel.

Scribe Section.

The streetlamps rage, chant fatalistic cantos,
I make myself wave to your room -
Auction on barter, building in mantra star
flesh and Picasso shade at my feet. Picture it,
the one arm lion tamer back for blood -
still bleeding, steel bleeding steps into the cage.
Another lesson, ages cross.

Everything looks fine from here.

Partially Hydrogenated Section.

The Rakehells slip by loose and loud - chawlin -
and a little drunk, rigged up like a friggate
on a monkey's wind - somewhere a cow grew

walking legs and wire cutters.

Like the time I left you sleeping
with a pepper mill turned loose in your loins,
A tangerine midget playing the turpentine blues,
a severed prayer necklace and fire.

it's charbroiled in the electroflesh vinyl
cooked pisspot of the gods.
it's creeping through the battery acid
holes in your underwear.

Navel Section.

When your wren died we put it in a box
placed neat beneath the stairs - like the rust
on flower petals, like the dust of worn hair.
Days cool to sweat and carving mortars
from my face - it's petals melting dark
manna on my tongue

These days - I dig you like a grave.

Water Log.

You come apart - you flow between,
two headed - one green, one sticky.
Moss rocks move no more
with the wind, it's time for penitence.

The tunes I whistle are wet
suggestions in a phone booth -
scrawl about a mountain bird.

Your face is such a crime - it tastes like water
but I'm drunk.

Offset.

Everything looks nice from a distance.

(actual size)

Chris S. Mihavetz

Diet Crack

(Poetry for people with short attention spans)

He who whistles while pissing has two minds, where one is quite superior.

And Ye said on the final day: "Our Lord Jesus died on the cross-walk"

Some people like butter rum cake. Some people gutter bums. I just rub Lester.

Skit skat hatterized cat, looking for the downbeat where is at...and watermellon.

I don't believe in Christmas anymore. I believe in Fred. He lives in the cellar.

Orville Wright was a drunk. He stuck two pencils in either end of an orange, ya know.

Yatzee!!!!

In them days we were born without stomachs, starved from the moment of birth.

I went alone to the drugstore. I stood in line and ate my Twinkies. I stood and waited.

My toes can talk, and they're smiling at me, saying, 'Why's everyone so strange?'

Cherry Crack

(Excerpts from the new book, A History of Sorority Poetry, Vol. I)

Mood Ring from God

I am woman.

Pink, fragile; a bent thimble.
Everyone's out to get me, no?

Like a shelless pomegranate,
I go seeding, seeding, seeding;
Wait! I've been violated!

I am woman, I said.
Indigo like god's mood ring;
It's always raining, and I'm always

stepping on broken mirrors.

It was her! That bitch! Last Friday night
you met her downtown, been seeing her
for weeks have you? You heartless beast,
you've been fucking her now for three weeks
and you told me you had a heart murmur?

You remember,
Said you couldn't have sex.
Not even hand jobs; it would send you into
convulsions. Remember?

Still, I a woman.
A peltless swan, wet, dreary.

On the horizon,
Flying, flying;

I'm still crying your tears.

My soul is a candle
burning with desire.
You are a match
striking, striking,
igniting me like a match.

by Kelli

Summer Love
We met at the sands of Time,
My heart filled with Love,
hiding the Fear and Uncertainty
that raged beneath my heaving bosom.
You stood there, tall as a tree
Staring, staring with your deep
blue eyes. We embraced.
But as the new tide rolled in
You slipped away from me
back into the depths of Death.
Oh, my love, you touched my
heart. How could you leave?

by Kelli

Ode to Kelli by Bill

You make me dream of turtledoves
and sticky wads of bubblegum
You make me think of fuzzy toads
the ones that lie out in the road.
You are my gravy boat of lust
You touch my heart, I touch your bust
You look to me like heaven's juice
and feel like little weasel boots.

I am your servant of carnal desire
I want you wrapped in my love wire
Dreaming of you makes me sweat
in buckets that just make me wet.
In your arms I could be free
but I won't even take a pee
'cause if I do I could miss a chance
to be down in your saucy pants.

Stale excess, velvet lampshades

Months away, the lady says it again:
He Was Loved Until He Was Political.
She smells of antiseptic and urine.
That Marked Him For Death, she says,
but I've heard it before. Her sausage
fingers are round the teacup,
her cigarette shadows her eyes, and I know
she's going down herself, in a quiet burp
of stale excess and velvet lampshades.

So long ago I'm reading you helter-skelter entries
on the brick wall. You're smiling slightly.
Then the sky crumbles gray and it rains, rains,
and we're sheltered.
On the last night you're giving me back the necklace
and wiping the window-fog into a crazy angel image
without realizing. The necklace drops,
our fingers are together, and
it just goddamn won't stop raining.

And They Tied Him With Nails To Ebonwood
says that fat lady. Propped, He Swung.
She's coughing the whole porch loose.
He Swung For Six Days but I've heard it all before.

I see your mother strung up in the livingroom.
Quincy's on TV. She never eats with the family,
can't you say. I give you the necklace in the kitchen.

The fat lady is speaking too soft
so I don't catch the end. I look, instead, at her
purple lamps, her painted screens,
her kneeling box with the wooden top.
She's talking low into her hollow chest
but I don't want to hear.

MikeSapp

What We Were Doing
The Night John Coleman Went Under

We were sitting on the Kappas porch,
screens breathing the dust-gnat summer
cigarette tips the only things that moved

We were swimming naked
through the salty muck of Coleman pond,
muddy feet cracking under the bronchial pines

We were stroking dying dogs
on their fat muzzles beneath Tomson Bridge,
waiting for the rain to stop.

We were copping hooker's comfort-
ers on the second story of Anne's Nursery,
poxed in the darkness

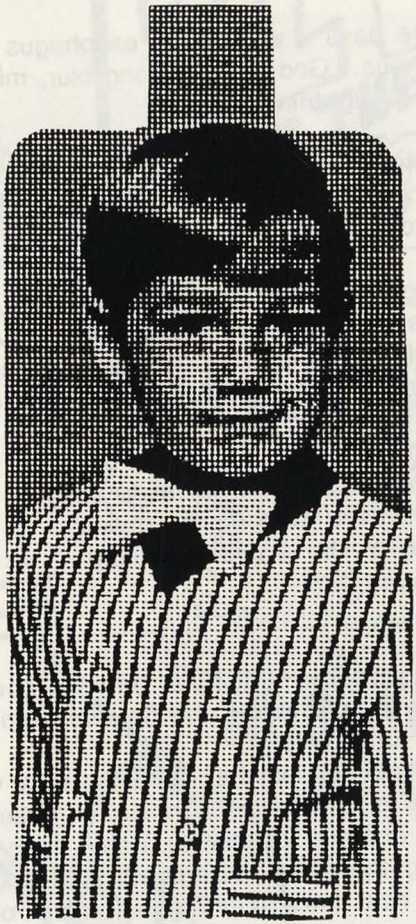
We were grappling on the pleated boxspring,
window still open, breeze stirring
her cross & her kleenex

We were pricking our forearms
on the drainspout nails
behind the greasepit, bleeding
on the gravel & eating
cheeseburgers

We were waiting for our fix
on the steps of Grand Central
Burger King, the Amoco, stealing
scarecrows for Abner's cruel joke,
whistling and thumbing our buckles,
pacing the streets pacing the trails,
mixing boones & beer by the boxcar stumps,
smoking & tripping along, heathens heaving it up
& having the time of our lives.

MikeSapp

Sexy....



Absolut Mihavetz.

Gran finale.

No puritan I know ever owned a piano.

In those days it was an all esophagus orchestra,
diaphanous. God as an oblong blur, misconstrued
like heat lightning.

Most nights, a cricket militia scourged the prairie
like a basin. Cowering under bricks of lye soap,
all in rote, yalping joddies:

We clean gold and we clean geese,
We clean gold and we clean geese,
We clean the grittiest sasquatch grease.
We clean the grittiest sasquatch grease.

Put 'm on a toadstool, put'm on a fig,
Put'm on a toadstool, put'm on a fig,
Put'm on rye for a dinner shindig.
Put'm on rye for a dinner shindig.

Once they spun a forest war on what goes around,
Down by a hole where the flat earth still stands.

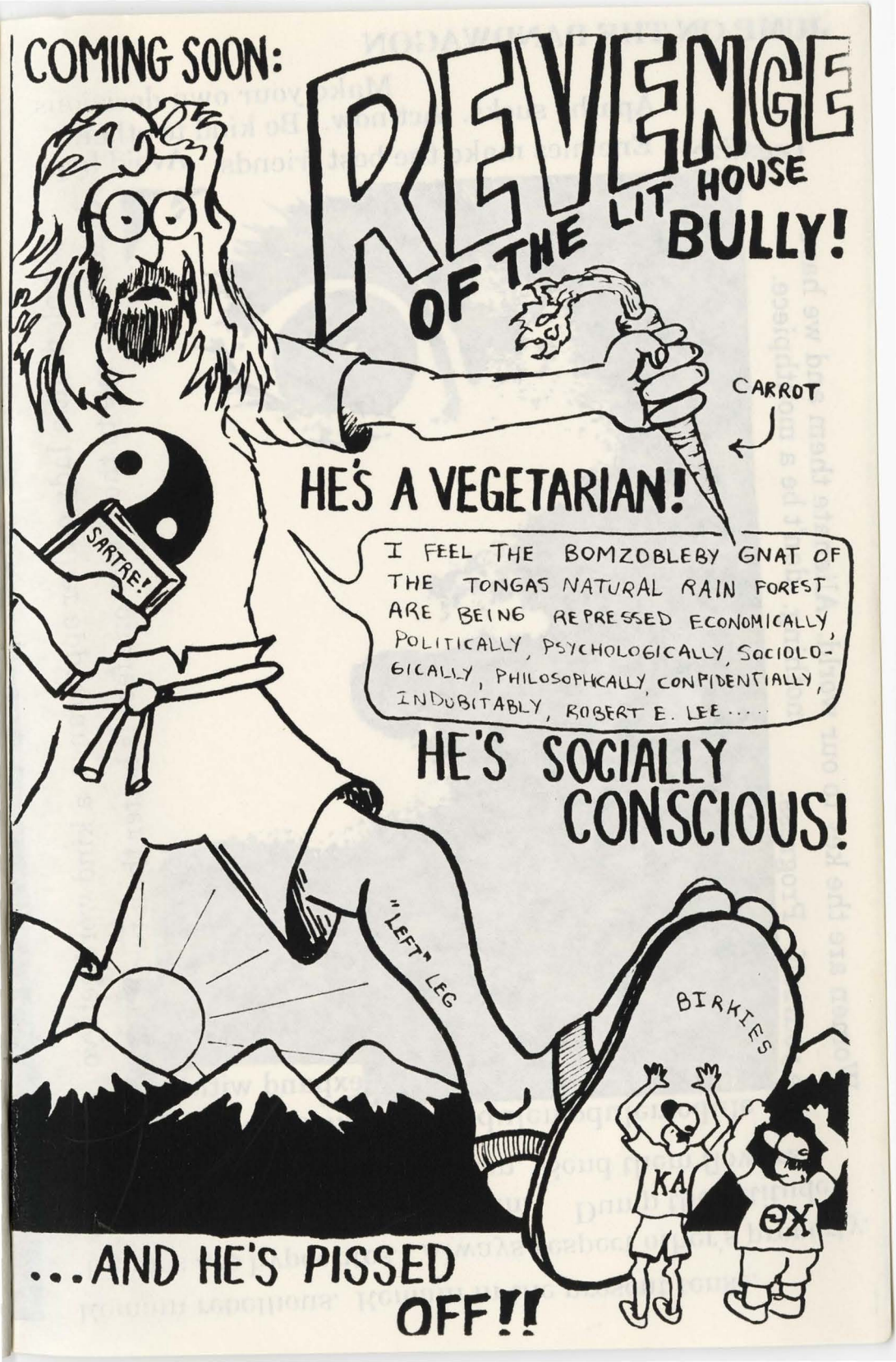
My grandmother lost her labia there, a virgin
till death; dried up like a raisin. Crickets
each on another, dissolved Gran's flesh intact,
gardening the moist underneath lipid spores in
her wig; next harvest brought a forest of
adhesive willows.

I heard it all-

Each insect playing their mini viola
as Gran was stapled to tree, to tree, to tree.
Piece by piece. Heat lightning.

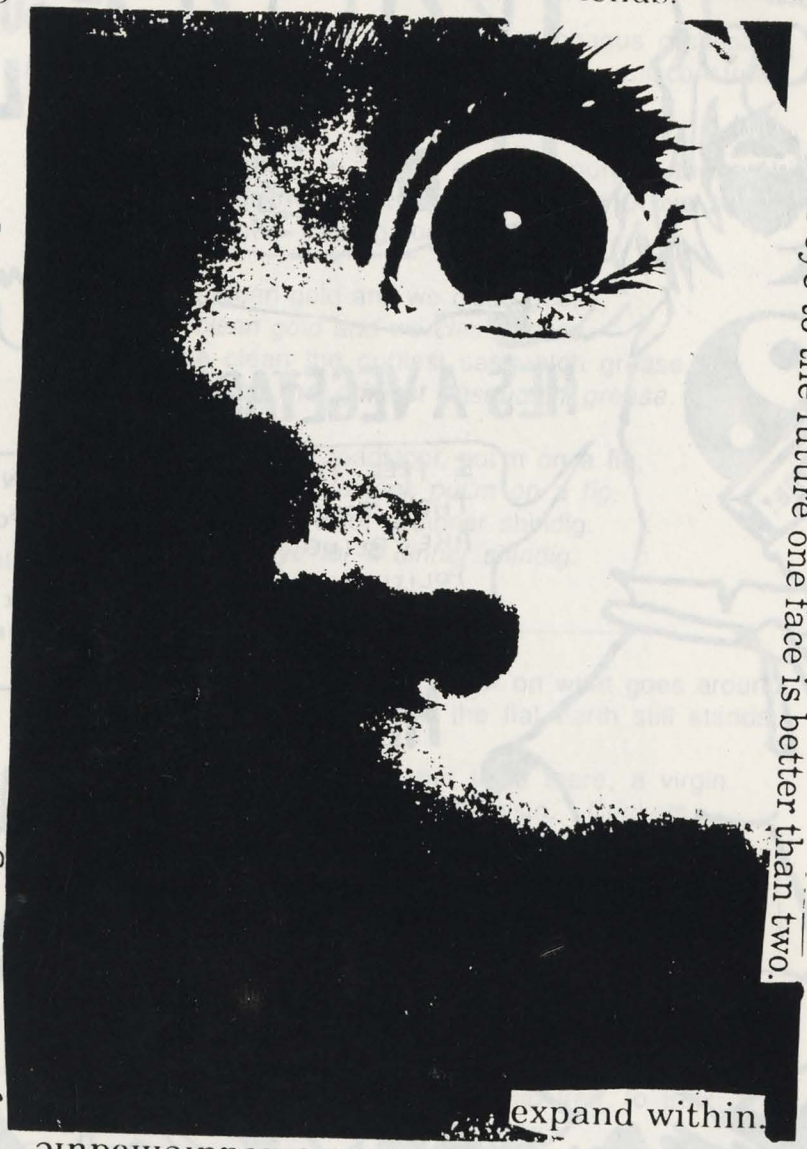
A menagerie of wood and skin.

Morgan Huff

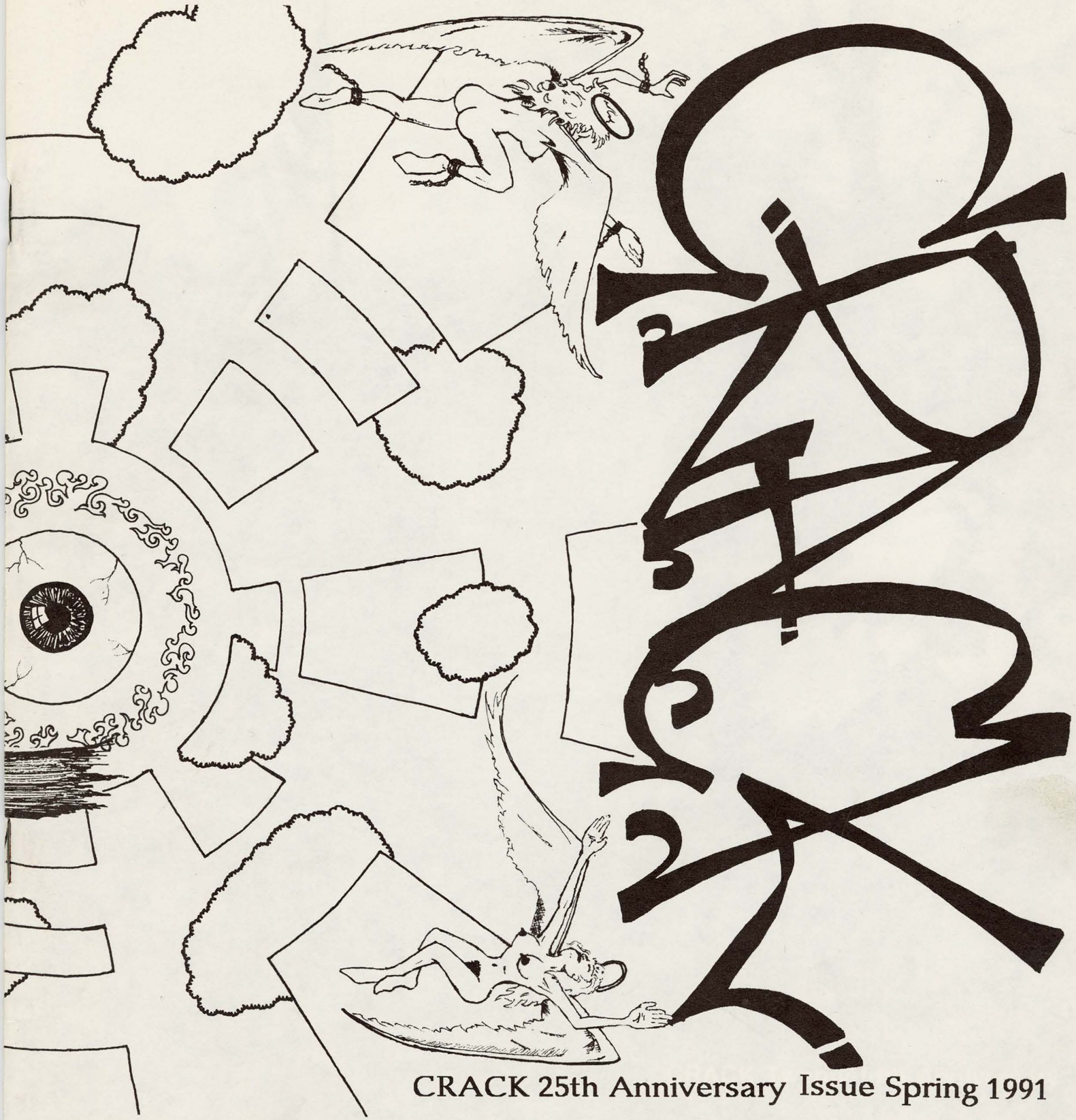

COMING SOON:
REVENGE OF THE LIT HOUSE BULLY!
CARROT
HE'S A VEGETARIAN!
SARTRE!
I FEEL THE BOMZOBLEBY GNAT OF THE TONGAS NATURAL RAIN FOREST ARE BEING REPRESSED ECONOMICALLY, POLITICALLY, PSYCHOLOGICALLY, SOCIOLOGICALLY, PHILOSOPHICALLY, CONFIDENTIALLY, INDUBITABLY, ROBERT E. LEE.....
HE'S SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS!
"LEFT" LEG
BIRKIES
KA
ΘX
...AND HE'S PISSED OFF!!

JUMP ON THE BANDWAGON

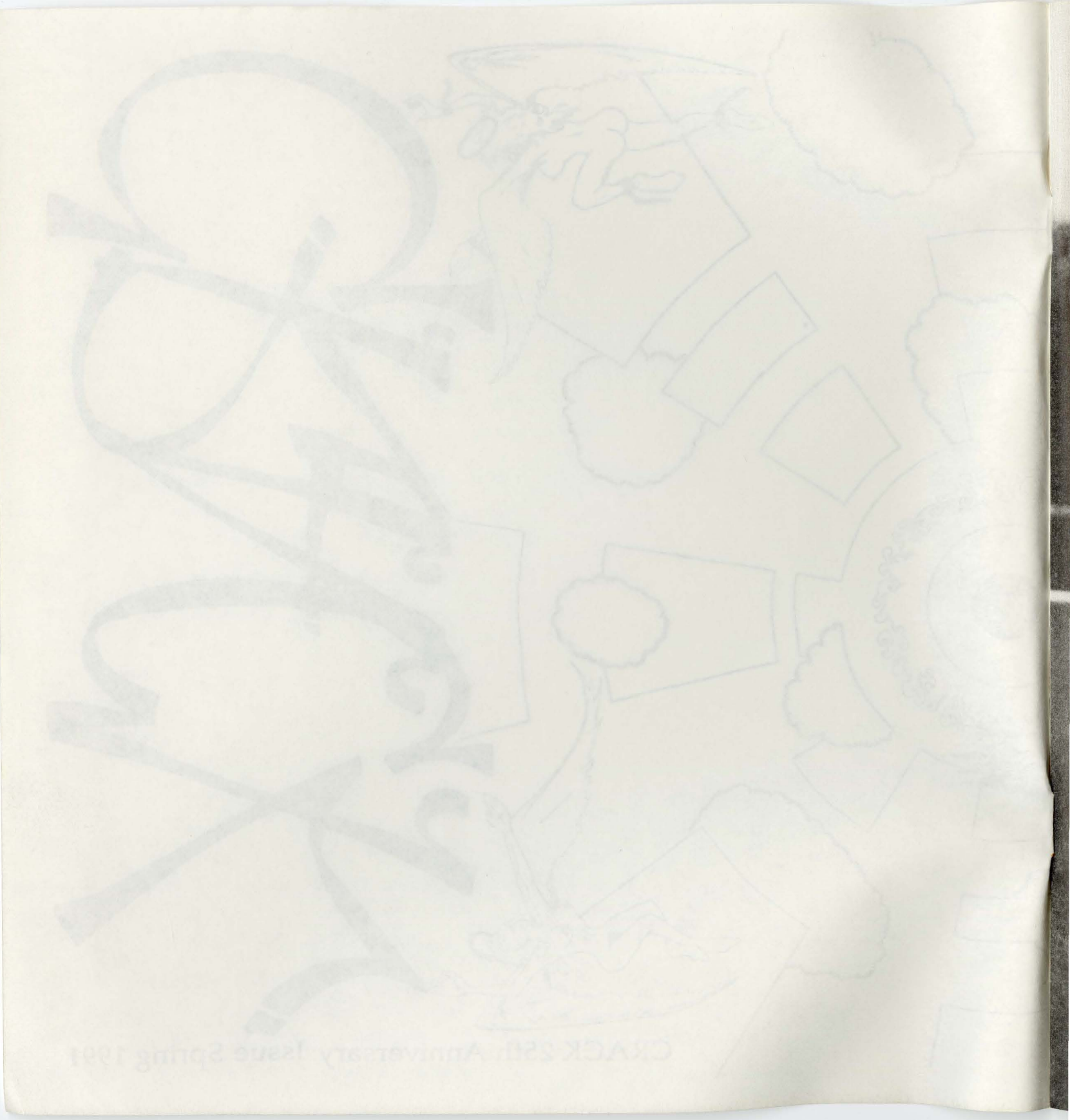
Make your own decisions.
Apathy sucks. Act now. Be kind to others.
Legalize. Enemies make the best friends. Avoid hype.

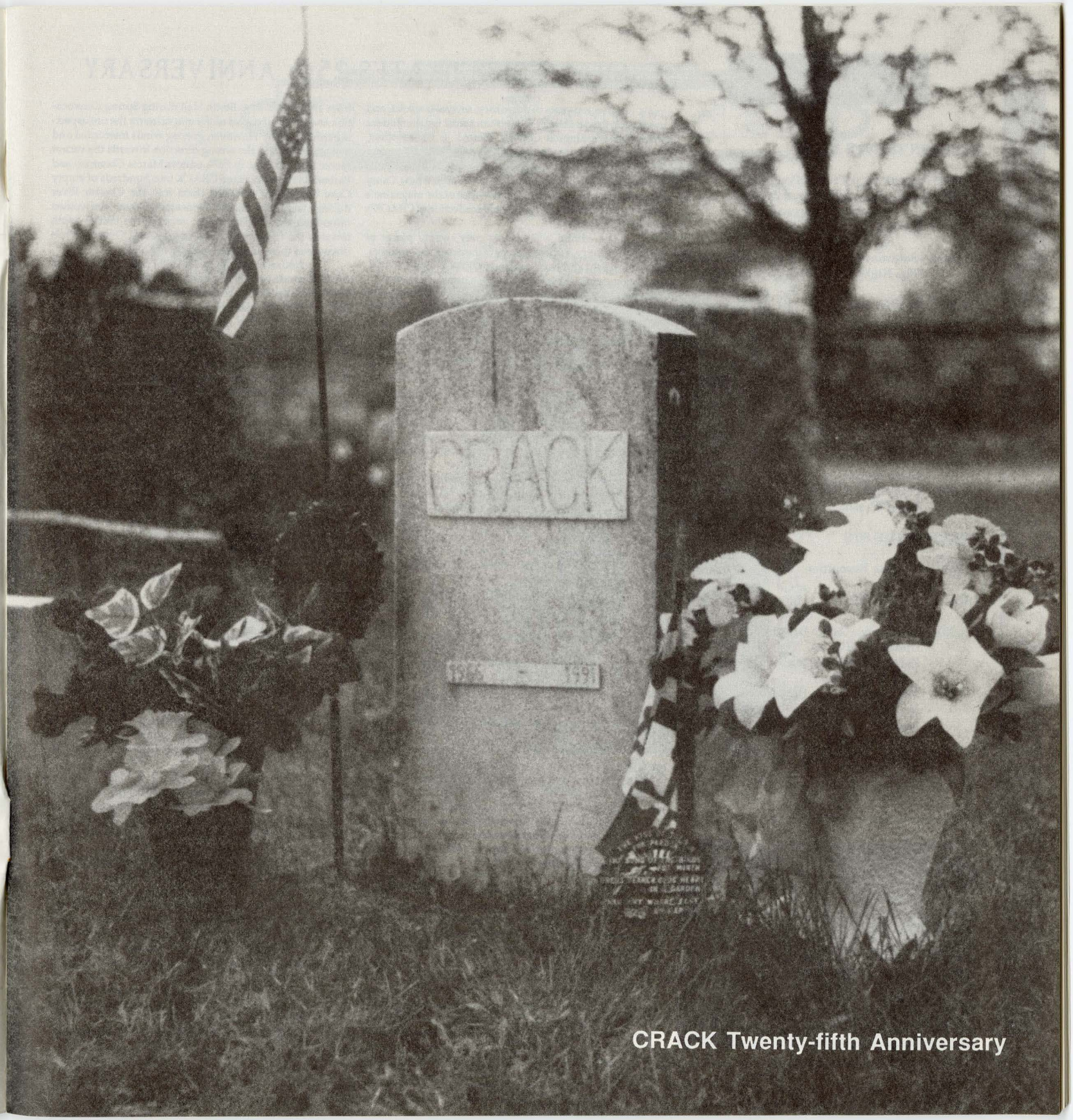


Women are the key to our world. Alienate them and we have nothing. don't be a mouthpiece.
Be yourself. Progress.
avoid trends. modulemodulemodulemodule
expand within.
complement a lady on her appearance. a kind word gets you farther.
Crack - an eye to the future one face is better than two.
remain rebellious. Remain in the present tense.
hippies are hypocrites. Always respect other's property.
laugh with people, not at them. Dump the attitude.
Hold doors open for women. Send them flowers.



CRACK 25th Anniversary Issue Spring 1991




CRACK
CRACK Twenty-fifth Anniversary

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This issue of Crack was funded by the Student Government Association of Washington College.

CRACK CELEBRATES 25th ANNIVERSARY

After ten years of dormancy, several lawsuits, and more back-fired publicity stunts than actual issues, student writers at Washington College, located in Chestertown, Maryland, have resurrected the infamous CRACK magazine for its twenty-fifth anniversary. The event, to take place on MayDay in the Forum room of the college's new Casey Academic Center, will feature the release of the magazine's commemorative issue, a retrospective collection of CRACK's literary history at WC.

The edition will include over twenty pieces of fiction and poetry, a photo history of the magazine's editors, and such recent additions as Cherry CRACK, Diet CRACK, and Revenge of the Lit House Bully, a campus cartoon.

Created in 1966 by Ronald Pitts, Jr., then a Junior English major from San Bernardino, California, CRACK has evolved from it's near pornographic roots to subsequent years as a poetry magazine, a political periodical, short-story issues, and a focus on experimental fiction. Yet, since it's 'birth', the magazine's release-day pranks have often eclipsed the actual writing, a process this year's editors, Pat Attenasio and Matt Shields, would like to see diminish.

"The magazine has an hysterical past, but the poetry and stories are often overlooked. We decided to put this commemorative issue together to celebrate the writing, not the antics," said Attenasio, hinting at CRACK's past history.

CRACK's editors in the past have often gone to great lengths to bring attention to their magazine. These antics have caused the present editors many problems in compiling the anniversary issue.

"We've had a hell of a time just finding existing copies of old CRACKs. Everything pre-1977 was virtually destroyed because some lunatic torched them all as a publicity stunt," Shields added.

"I respect what they did, 'cause I know how hard it is to get people to read literary magazines, but it's too bad most of them backfired," Attenasio said.

The editors are referring to CRACK's 1977 editor, Vincent Brody, who during a lecture on Deconstructionalism coinciding with the magazine's release party, doused himself, and a pile of CRACKs from the previous twelve years, with kerosene and ignited it in front of Smith Hall. The lecture did not stop, but the magazines, along with several layers of Brody's skin were burned beyond recognition.

Subsequent years have seen various other pranks, usually with similar results. Pitts held a naked dance at Richard House for the premiere release in 1966, an event that has evolved into MayDay, where Washington College students strip down on May first to celebrate the rights of spring. At this first party, however, Pitts and several other students were arrested for indecent exposure. The editor's argument, stating he had the right to "bare arms," did not sway the arresting officers decision.

Christian Inouhe and Dylan Starr, the 1969 CRACK editors, promised readers an all-night orgy in Minta Martin, the college's sorority dorm, if they attended the magazine's release. For the first time ever, all the male residents of Kent House were in attendance, but left disappointed after the sorority girls barricaded the doors and reinforced their windows.

In 1967, editors Wesley Barrett and Moonpile promised free marijuana to anyone who came to CRACK's release. Hundreds of students and faculty showed up along with Security and the Chestertown Police only to find the editors passed out around a tall, well-consumed hookah pipe.

Zeke Osbourne and Cliff Foster, CRACK's editors from 1975, stood atop Smith Hall during Spring Convocation and dumped copies of the magazine on the unsuspecting crowd below. However, gusting winds interceded and blew the papers in the wrong direction towards the vacant soccer field. Finally, in 1979, editors Marcia Glassman and Barbara Livingston, fitted CRACK into hundreds of empty Coke bottles and dumped them into the Chester River during a large crew regatta. Once again though, the women misjudged the river's current, sending the bottles south towards the Chesapeake Bay where Coast Guard patrols discovered them and fined the school $2000.

After a brief stint in 1981 as a political periodical, CRACK would remain dormant until 1990 when Attenasio and Shields decided to resurrect the magazine. The editors have encountered many of their own difficulties, especially with the name. Pitts originally penned the name as an ambiguous term, but recently the word has been associated with the highly addictive, cheap by-product of cocaine.

"We are comfortable with the name," said Shields, "I mean the more meanings it gathers the better. Yet, when we approached the college's Board of Visitors and Governors about funding, they rejected us simply because they thought the name was unrepresentative of Washington College. No shit."

Last year's release had its own controversial stunts. Flyers announcing the magazine's release stated "FREE CRACK AT THE LITERARY HOUSE," a slogan the administration, especially former President Cater did not find humor in. Then, in an effort to bring more publicity to the magazine, the editors included a degrading centerfold with a local fraternity brother's face superimposed onto it with an equally vicious data sheet. Although the centerfold was the most recognized and popular inclusion to CRACK, it also brought several disciplinary meetings and lawsuits to the editors.

"That was one of the dumber things we did last year," Attenasio stated.

This year's retrospective, funded for the first time ever with school funds from the Student Government Association, has also sparked some controversy. When the funds were allocated during the fall semester, some disgruntled students published their own "This Is Not CRACK magazine."

"I guess you could say we're following in the footsteps of the previous CRACK editors," Attenasio said. "It's funny that a literary magazine can cause people to get so upset."

"Yeah, all we [the CRACK editors] have ever wanted is to have as many people possible read this magazine. We don't want to be another coffee-table publication just for the literary types," Shields added. "There's some really fine work behind all the bullshit, and we'll do whatever we can to make people see that."

"Well, almost anything," Attenasio stated, pointing to the centerfold in last year's issue.

When asked about the magazine's future, the editors could not give an affirmative answer. "I don't know," Shields said about the question, "we're not sure what's going to happen after this anniversary issue come out."

"If we don't do it, maybe someone else will in a couple years. That has always been the trend with CRACK," Attenasio added.

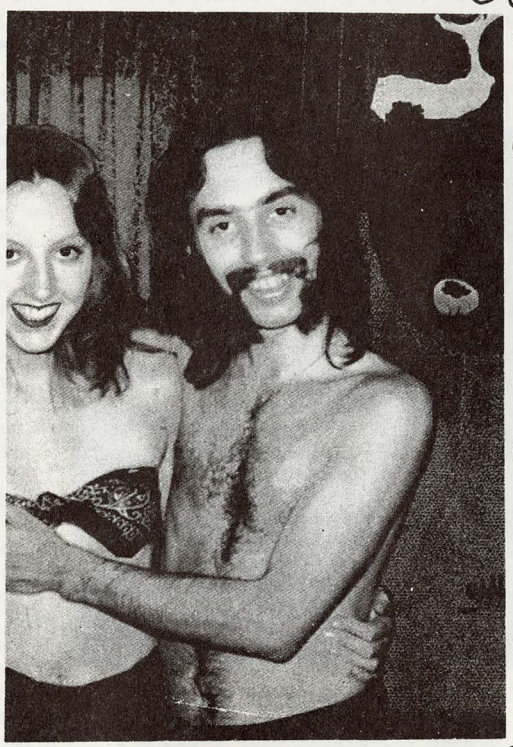
Now that the magazine's literary past seems secure in this year's edition, CRACK's future, and that of its editors, remains uncertain.

"But," Attenasio said, "if this is it for us, we hope to go out with a bang."

Our Founder

1966

Ronnie Pitts, Jr.



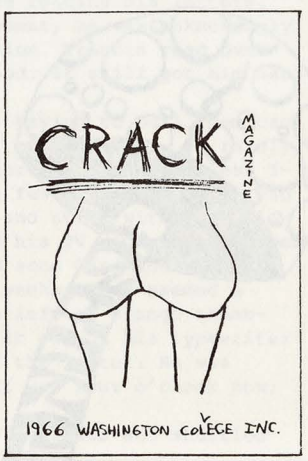
April 13, 1991

Dear CRACK.

Literary magaziners suck. They are created by pompous assholes, and usually collect more dust than interested readers. When I started CRACK back in 1966, I never thought it would be around in 25 years. We liked to have fun while 'exposing' some good writing.

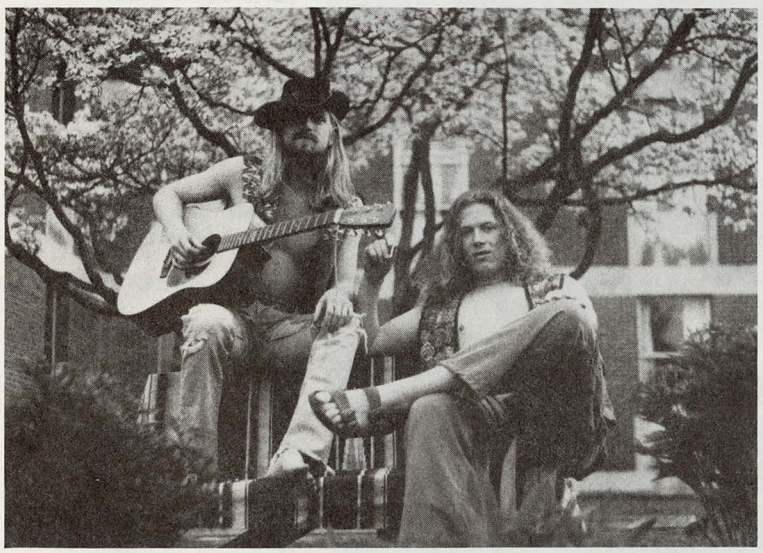
I hope you keep the original intent of CRACK in mind when compiling the new issue. If anyone gets in your way FUCK 'EM! Don't let CRACK become a coffee-table magazine. Good Luck.

-Ronnie Pitts, Jr.

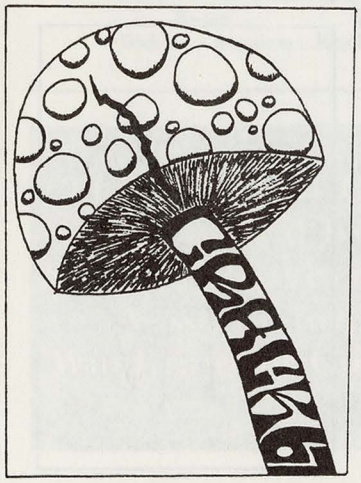


SIXTIES

'67-'68



Wesley Barrett & Moonpile



'69

Christian Inouhe & Dylan Starr

Speak Your Piece

by
Doug Smith

... in the back seat Holly and Molly were completely naked. In the rearview mirror I could see them perfectly. Holly (or was it Molly?) had her hand on her sister's glistening cunt, gently massaging her to orgasm as Molly (or was it Holly?) was busy sucking her perky tits. I pulled over and climbed in the back seat, luscious twins pulling my clothes off as I got into the car. By now Holly and Molly were in a tight 69. Holly was on top, her wonderful ass thrusting at dick level. I spread her legs apart and inserted my hot rod into her steaming box. Molly began licking my balls, and I alternated strokes, giving each sister her turn on my pole, and exploded into the greatest orgasm of my life as I plunged my screaming member into Molly's hungry mouth, shooting a heavy load all over her happy tonsils. We all fell asleep together in the back seat, and in the morning they were gone. I still have fond memories to this day of the time I disregarded my mother's advice not to pick up hitch-hikers. *-Name and address withheld.*

His typewriter stopped. The letter was finished. One hand clawed out a cigarette from the pack, the other fumbled with a clear blue plastic lighter. He puffed on his Kool and read back the letter from the beginning. Not bad; the author, driving cross-country, picks up two nubile young hitchhikettes (twins, no less), who spend the next thousand miles sucking and fucking every square inch of his body (and their own).

He had never been cross-country before. It worried him. Would people be able to tell? Once he had gone to Des Moines to visit his cousin. He had taken a train with his mother. He decided that no one would notice. He had been writing correspondence for Spurt almost two years now and nobody seemed to notice. He'd read "Speak Your Piece" (as it was listed in the table of contents; in the office the editors referred to it as "Beat Your Piece") for fifteen before he found out that they were actually written by a staff writer for the magazine.

Francis J. Goodyear was 31 years old and stood about 5 feet 7 inches. His weight fluctuated around 300 pounds and his penis was 8.34 inches long. He was extremely proud of this fact, even though he'd never used it for anything except pissing and masturbation. He had never kissed a girl with perhaps the exception of his mother and his cousin Betty, but that didn't count.

He ground out his cigarette in the ashtray. He had bought it four years ago, when he had gone to Des Moines. It had a picture of a stalk of wheat and the name of the city on the bottom. If he dumped all of the butts out he could read it. He liked cigarettes. When he turned 18, he had gone to the grocery store and bought a pack of cigarettes and a case of beer. The beer made him sick, but he forced himself to drink every can. The cigarettes were unfiltered, Lucky Strikes like his father smoked. He didn't like them either. The next day he had gone back to the grocery store and bought a pack of each brand, determined to find one he could call his own. Kools were his favorite. The menthol reminded him of the medicine his mother gave him on the days he'd stay home from school.

He didn't like school. It wasn't his fault he was fat. It was a glandular problem, the doctor had said. At school they called him things like "Fat Francis" and the ever-popular "Goodyear Blimp"; he always had the meanest practical jokes played on him. One day, when he was thirteen... it wasn't his fault he was so fat. It wasn't his fault the crack of his ass hung out of his pants when he sat down. They used to call him "The Man and the Moon" and one day when he was thirteen the kids at the table behind him in the cafeteria stuck bits of food down the back of his trousers. In his butt. He could hear them titter and guffaw, future class presidents and homecoming queens and respected members of society. It wasn't until he got up and felt the cold dampness of roast beef in his jockey shorts that he realized something was up. He'd gone to the bathroom amidst a cloud of sadistic laughter and found the dregs of twenty-odd lunchbags, including an entire Slim Jim. Francis had walked home. They would've let him go if he'd asked, but he would have had to tell them why he had to go home first. When he got home, his mother was there, and when she asked him why he was home so early he burst into tears and she hugged him and he cried into her shoulder for an hour. He stayed home for the rest of the week.

That night he heard his parents arguing downstairs. They argued alot. His father thought she was coddling Francis. He called her a whiny smothering bitch. She cried. This was nothing new, one variation of a constant theme. Francis lay on his bed, listening. It was his fault. He knew he disgusted his father, who yearned for a son to carry on the tradition, a child he could toss a football with, to whom he could pass on the secrets of manhood to. Instead he was stuck with a formless blob of protoplasm that came home from school blubbering with his underwear full of lunch meat.

One day when he was fourteen his father never came home from work. It was soon after that he found the box of magazines, hidden behind his father's golf clubs. Francis hid them under his bed and poured over them like a monk over his tomes. He knew his father liked Spurt the best because it made up the majority. The letters were his favorite part of the magazine, and judging from the fact that the pages were frequently gummed shut, they were his father's, too. Maybe he was somewhere reading his letters. Maybe even right now, this very moment, he was unknowingly marvelling at his son's poetic vision. Francis read over his piece again. He knew it was good. It still got him hard even after a third reading.

He fumbled with his drawers, trying to pull them back over his waist without getting out of the chair. He rarely wore anything except his jockey shorts and a sleeveless T-shirt. He hadn't changed them in a few days; his shirt had a few holes in it and was stained and stiff with the drippings and droppings of himself and his TV dinners. He wiped his hands on his chest and grabbed some Chee-tos out of a bag that had been sitting out for weeks. They seemed a little rubbery. The powdery cheese left an orange thumbprint on the paper when he pulled it out of his typewriter and paperclipped it to the rest of the letter. He was supposed to get his check today. It was four o'clock now; the mail was usually in by three.

He pulled on a pair of grimy overalls and shuffled

out the door and into the elevator. On the third floor it stopped. Leila McDonald got on. She lived in 3-G. She was a stewardess and spent two weeks of every month out of town. Sometimes when she was staying in her apartment, Francis would sit on his fire escape in all kinds of weather to masturbate to the sounds of Leila fucking her boyfriend.

Leila stood at the front of the elevator, her back to him and watching the numbers light down. She wore a tight black mini-skirt, and Francis noticed she had no panty-line or stockings. Instinctively he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

...The elevator buckled twice and stopped between floors. The lights flickered and died, leaving us illuminated solely by the red emergency light. She turned around to face me, smiling suggestively and sliding her thumbs under the straps of her top. "We might be here awhile," she purred. "Maybe we ought to get... better acquainted." I stared at her tits as they were oh so slowly revealed to me, and began sucking like a newborn babe, pulling up her dress, massaging her juicy snatch. She grabbed my fly and furiously tore open the front of my pants, too hungry for my cock to bother undoing the zipper. My pants dropped around my ankles and she ripped my boxers right off of my body. She grabbed my shoulders, impaling herself on my rock hard shaft with one flying leap and...

The elevator buckled twice and stopped between floors. Leila crossed her arms, tapping one heeled foot impatiently. Francis cringed against the back of the car, unable to move or breathe. The lights flickered once and then the elevator resumed its downward course.

They stopped in the lobby. Leila got out and walked through the main doors, flagging down a cab almost instantly. Francis stood in the elevator for a minute steadying his nerves. The doors began to shut and he threw his foot between them, sending them rolling back even as they lightly bumped into it.

The elevator opened into a short corridor, its walls lined with the metal flaps of mailboxes. The doors were clear glass, and the wall they were set into was plate. A middle-aged woman with a wart on her nose stood riffling through her box, blue curlers in her mousy hair and worn pink fuzzy slippers on her feet. She lived alone two doors down from him, in 8-E. Her name was Edna Pottlesdamp, and she was the building's resident gossip, constantly whispering the details of her neighbors' lives into the telephone receiver that hung from her ear fourteen hours a day, seven days a week, three hundred sixty five days a year. She rarely left her rooms.

Francis sidled up to his box. It was next to her, and the sound of his key in the lock made her jump. She went back to studying her letters, her head buried in the intricacies of the Publisher's Clearing House Sweepstakes. Francis shot her several quick glances as he got his mail. A sheaf of bills, two large plain brown envelopes, and something from Spurt, probably his check.

Edna looked at him. He looked at her and she thrust her face into a letter in a pink envelope. Francis stared at her for a moment longer then looked back at his stack of mail. Edna's voice crackled low, hesitant like a spy risking her life to pass on a secret message. "Nice weather we've been having lately."

Francis looked at her, smiled and dartingly looked onto the street. Outside it was grey. "Yeah, I guess it's a pretty nice day." He stared at her face for awhile trying to come up with something to say. A minute passed. They regarded each other's shoes and finally Francis said, "I've got to uh get back to my work. It's been uh nice talking to you."

He purposefully took the stairs, grumbling to himself the whole way. When he reached the eighth floor, there was nobody in the hall. He cautiously unlocked his door, paused and started walking towards Edna's apartment. He didn't get past 8-F, and stood stranded between points, his head flipping first at 8-E, then 8-G. It was as if his feet were nailed to the floor, and he would be frozen forever in front of 8-F. His neighbors, Peter File and his family, would retrieve their paper every morning from his mouth. He would be their lawn jockey. The door suddenly opened and two little girls appeared, identical in every respect from the way they wore their hair to the dolls they carried in their left hands. They wove through him and ran down the hall to play. The tension broke and Francis hurriedly skulked towards 8-G, throwing a glance over his shoulder as if something was following him..

Back in his place he finished off the bag of Chee-tos on the table, tossing the empty bag into the trash. The overalls came off and he balled them up and threw them on the floor. The ashtray was full, and he thought about emptying it. Instead Francis stared at the hundreds of centerfolds that papered his walls, wet warm receptive and inviting, and lit another Kool.

I live in an apartment building, and recently I happened to get my mail at the same time as my neighbor. Donna is an incredibly ravishing brunette with breasts that reaffirmed my faith in God. I'd passed her on my way to work but I'd never actually met her until one fateful afternoon when I happened to come home at the same time that she was getting her mail. She had a black kimono on, and as I approached she let it slip open provocatively. I couldn't help but notice that underneath her robe she was as naked as the day she was born, and almost immediately my cock was swelling to its full nine inches. I had my mailkey in my hand, and she grabbed it, taking my key and guiding it into the folds of her kimono. "I didn't get any letters today. Could you put some male in my box?" she sighed, and gave a little moan as my fingers probed her hot pussy, already sopping wet with anticipation. She pulled me to the floor and began to undo my trousers. My pole shot out of my pants as soon as she had undone the fly...

As he fumbled with his drawers, he knew this would be a good one. His father would be proud.

Notes from a neutered Zygote in America.

Dominus providebit. Agris vastatis. Litteris sciptis: intermultos cibos edere arena.
- Bob's Big Boy

1.

There isn't a woman alive who can out fuck rigor mortis.
At least, that's what our hero keeps repeating. Monsieur Zygote squatting on a toilet, legs pale, knobby, parted. Reading *The Sierra Club Home Planet Postcard Collection* just to arouse a hard-on: "Weightlessness comes on abruptly. I soared as if I was inside a soap bubble. Like an infant in the womb of my spacecraft, still a child of my Mother Earth" (Miroslav Hermaszewski).

And here in some Buffalo hotel, a toilet really *is* a silver rocket: Monsieur furrowed neck, beading with sweat as he pumps clinched-fist 'round 'bout his penis. Eulogizing the now verecose organ with a gentle stream of formal endearments and stylized courtesy ("My Father, My Mother, My Dove, My Little Heart, Yes indeed you're right, Yes indeed, Of course, Thank you, Thank you E-VER SOO MUCH, My Dove Heart. . .") coo's that subdue the volcanous undertow of potential violence.

And Monsieur sings: "O Testes, My Testes! An iron fist *is* the only means to conquer some globes." Did Hitler masturbate in prison? Monsieur wonders. "O my Magnanimous Dick tater! It would take a lot o' goo to fill the Grand Canyon craters."

(Magna cools rapidly in contact with the surrounding rocks.
The heat of injected material may metamorphose an adjoining object.)

"Damn craters would expand with each once o' molten ooze. That's lava goo, not motor lubricants. . . As for the latter, a bodily extension of such logic would be rape. Earth Mother: "You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man?" Exxon nods: "Absolutely dingo! At the poles, those waves sure do quell the horrible gurgle of the toilet box." And Stalone agrees: (eyeing young damsels from cinema screens in both Dakota's) "Eh', Buckle Up!" And if you squint hard enough, you can still see the brilliant luminosity of Hollywood's blackhole; fire-rim blinking in code a la' Morse:
(translation) "Be careful. . .
There are lots of rats around here these days."

Seems God arrives just as the guests are leaving: "Etu' Brute', Etu' Brute'.
Hey. . . Where's *my* valet home?"

2.

There's a virulent word crusading the world: *Ruse ~ An action meant to confuse.*
Just ask Zoraster: "I was definitely aware of the pushing of my uterus
towards the front and the intensity of the orgasm(s)
I experienced brought tears to my eyes. But I was
unaware of the tremendous amount of fluid produced
until I got up from the bed, which was sopping wet."

'I did that?' I asked him. . .
'Yep.'
'All of it?'

'Well, I haven't even taken my pants off yet.'
'Wow,' I screamed. . .

"After that, my Grafenberg spot became my 'Extrapolated Weasel (Mustela Frenata).' But my Huby likened it as his own personal 'Cosmic Earl Gibb's Atomic Fuck Button. Anyhow, my appreciation of sex increased tenfold with the discovery that I can 'come like a man.'

How to: Be-
come
Ulysses.

~ One part Trojans.
~ One part Pubococcygeus (*see* 'Cave of Polyphemus')

Repeat at intervals: *Vive'* ~
Vive' ~
Vive' ~

She: "I don't really enjoy sex with Ulysses because even at climax, he makes no sound. It embarrasses me that, by contrast, I slobber a lot and my body springs and recoils like an accordion."

He: "(sigh). . . Let's order Chinese."

Post-ejaculatory dream sleep: Mrs. DiFillippo's meatball's have grown to the size of meteors. There's Lucretius, crouched beside the beefiest ball. He's tearing bits o'red pepper, zucchini out from its core. Listen:"May reason rather than the event itself convince you that the whole cow can collapse with one ear-splitting crack!"

~ (She: Punches him in the kidney. Notices one of his ribs is missing): "Wake up, Uly!
W - a - k-e Up!"
~ (He: Groggy. Still dreaming that Lucretius' giant spaghetti topping has exploded):
"Huh!?
Mrs.DiFillipo?
Oh. . . Just you.
Did you come
Too?

And the desert orgasm rages, even though Lao-tzu Say:
The best soldier is not soldierly;
The best fighter is not ferocious.

3.

Somewhere in Hoboken, NJ: Rm. 96, *Best Western* hotel. (30 minutes to midnight) There's Ted Koppel atop an 80-inch Zenith. Smoking filterless cigarettes. He's dripping ginseng from both nostrils, absinthe from his urinary tract. Buns up naked, Teddy manages to clog his colon with a tiny green Guideons Bible: Arms free, T. nibbles at a

Twinkie from one hand, changes channels with the other ~ He's searching for a new made-for-t.v. mini-drama created via' a Becket play.

It's called: "Waiting for Bridgette Bardot."
Staring: Tim Conway as Estragon.
Leonard Helmsly as Pozzo.
And Alf, as the alien, cat-eating, Vladimir.

~TED CHANGES CHANNELS BE-
LOW
On the Screen (Telefuck, Vision USA): A surgically removed Presidential polyp is blurred by the split second story splice by *Scientific America* : "Black holes form at the beginning of ('click') fruits, with small, hairy seeds that are easily distributed by the wind ('click') a melange ofbody organ's, F-15's, serp- ('click') 'C'mon Shirley,it's not just Dr.'s who get to see their friend's in the bum' ('click') ' Wolverines! Wol- ('click') semaphores erect, distended, jubilant, twitching, tickling, sucking, clinging, she could fuck to her heart's ('click')'hamburger? Chopped beef? No, it's' they were his only sol- ('click') -itary hero, Stormin Norman'states ('click') 'in the event that this had been an emergency, you woud've heard' ('click') 'I can't believe it's a girdle, gird- ('click') 'tight like a cartridge, and then go off into the electrically moist darkness of a mouth with the soft lips of an arti-choke' ('click') 'Sweetgum. The hanging, dry fruit, a ball covered with tiny horns, opens to release small winged' ('click') 'nut! Sometimes you don't! Mounds got deep dark chocolate and' ('click') epignathic parasites, lumps of subhumanity with limbs more suggested than defined, who seem to be emerging from the mouths of their ('click') Slinky! It's Slinky! Oh-' ('click') 'when I douche' ('click') 'Dy-no-mite!!!

And there's Ted Koppel atop an eighty-incher. Cigarette burns sprouting pine-simulated blisters all over Teflon furniture, filterless butts covering the floor: smarmy and black, they peer up at Ted's hollowed face as if to say, "There isn't a woman alive who can out fuck rigor mortis!" But he already knows. Did a broadcast on the stiffening news. Now he's just silent, nude, cross-legged on the tube.
On screen, a preacher woo's America (6:20 a.m.):

"Can't out fuck rigor mortis! Why that's heresy!
If the hand o' God could split a tower in half,
and part the insidious ocean waters for Moses,
then what's a few cramps in the fibers of a dead man?"

And stuck in the lotus position since sun-up,
Teddy boy feels his own thighs cramping, kidney's draining milk o' magnesium thick as an embryonic buffalo. And night turns to mid-dawn,

the ice already melted in a brown plastic bucket, used
shower caps slung across shag carpet. . . DO NOT
DISTURB, written in rouge lipstick lettering
across Ted's forehead.

AND TELEFUCK VISION, USA: (still on, still on):
It's a talk-
show
with
Be-
elz-
ebub.

"I've been reading *The Inferno* Regis. . .
Don't believe Dante. It's all lies. . .
Hell is absolutely free."
---

dangling
dangling
dangling

(Shake: To cause to move to and fro w/ jerky movements)

O Monsieur Zygote, where for art thou desiccating.
Evangelicalism sends you its holy gobbledygoo.
The tyrants have all landed, licking up glass oil.
Some are laying on the beach with black puss in their
bloodstreams. Go to the mountains Monsieur.
Go to:

Spit,
Gnaw,
Devour.

Yeah, that's right.
It's all undone.

MORGAN HOFF

VERTICAL MOVEMENT
[everyone i've ever known]

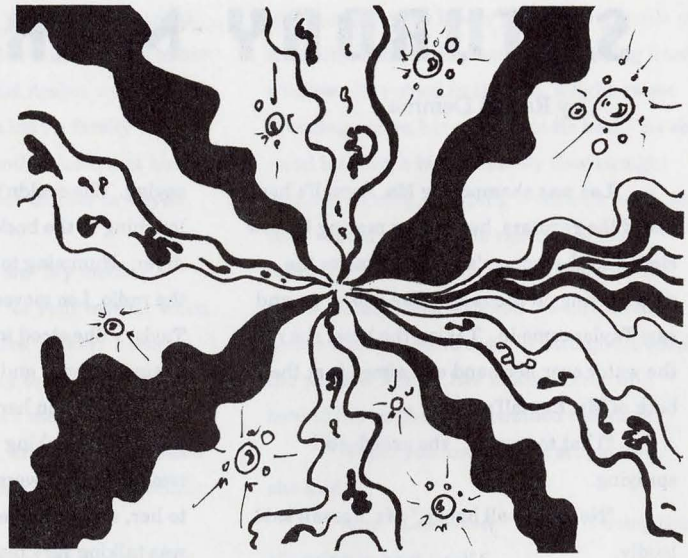
unpierced ear wanting to be kissed
leftover scraps of celery on the dirty cafe floor
ringlets of ivory clipped from fingernails, or gloves

leave me a letter, written on ivory parchment,
Stamped with a wax seal
from Cindy's purple candles, Dance
dance up over the left couch
(That girl over there in black swears entirely too fucking much)
with a beautiful boy on mushrooms,
He lays his fingers lightly on your arm,
He tells you each time you eat a meal
that what you are wearing is Lovely.
Last time you saw him, he only wore a towel.
Every time you see him, he wears towels on his waist.

dance closely to him and touch his neck, light, like this,
run your hand through your own hair, twirl it on your finger, slow,
breathe slowly on his shirtcollar, move your finger along his
necklace
Don't let him kiss you:
He might want a commitment or something
He might want you to go out to his apartment
He might want you to pay half
(or pay half naked)
He might want to pay your way
He might want to take you to the birthday ball
He might make you double date with his twin brother.
You don't know him well at all, do you?
(His brother is a better kisser, I'll tell you right now, honey)

You scorn the leftovers
(chickpeas, brussels sprouts, stale saltines with sogged peanut butter,
tunacasserole with cheese, melted chickensteakpatties on bun).
You eat pastries until you become so fat
that you know no one in the room.
They refuse your politics.
They refuse to believe you when you show them your scars.
(She's all too eager to show us her scars.)

We left the cocktail party early today;
We usually get wasted in a tea-dress
and run around to the city fountains
and steal the change to buy doughnuts with.
We asked them once, "How many miles to San Bernadino?"
They were confused but a cop
got out a map and measured
scale of miles
2 thousand something.
We thanked them but they didn't notice our trackmarks.



AFTER HIGH

street, I walked on by myself;
I saw all the bushes flatten out and curl up into
broken planes of green,
I saw my own shadow lifted around
me a thousand million times.
The drain grate under my curb:
Nothing came out of it and no glowing eyes appeared,
(I almost wish it had done so my fears would be
rational fears)
and dim strangers with cigarettes passed by the porch
quickly.

"They had no faces," I told R,
later, when his eyelashes were in view.
"You said they were Hispanic?" He blew smoke
in my face, so I didn't answer. My left ankle has five
red bites on it,
from mosquitos (my entourage).

All the way home I looked into third
floor windows, from the ground,
I couldn't see any people,
Just large lamps, woodwork, and white walls,
(no no problem i don't get hangovers\
yeah but you never passed out before either\
oh yeah)
and the sidewalks painted themselves bricklike the
whole way to my room.

Poetry by J. Tarin Towers

SATURDAY MORNING

by Rachel Demma

Lee was shampooing Ms. Earsall's head, one of the regulars, her fingers moving in slow circles on the woman's scalp in time to the song playing on the radio. She looked up and saw Taylor come in. Taking the hose, she ran the water over her hand and aimed it at the back of Ms. Earsall's head.

"That too warm," she asked, still spraying.

"No, not at all honey," Ms. Earsall said loudly.

Lee ran her fingers through the gray hair, watching the soapy water swirling in the bottom of the pink plastic sink before it went down the drain. She looked at Angie and Taylor standing by the front window, in the bright sunlight, talking. Turning off the water and reaching behind her to get a towel, she stared.

Lee led Ms. Earsall past Kate blow-drying a woman's hair, and Jean and Sheryl laughing loudly as they sipped their sodas, to one of the pink plastic chairs near the front, saying, "Watch your step now," even though there was really nothing for her to slip on.

Leaving Ms. Earsall sitting in the chair expectantly facing the mirror, Lee was not sure if she should interrupt Angie and Taylor. Angie always did Ms. Earsall and Lee thought the old woman would rather wait for her regular girl than have Jean or Sheryl right away. Lee remembered her mother telling her that old women don't like to have their normal routine interrupted. She said it was bad for business to juggle them around from girl to girl.

Lee leaned against the front counter and tried to hear what Angie and Taylor were saying. She couldn't really hear them over the laughing in the back and the radio and hair-dryer. Humming to the Willy Nelson song on the radio, Lee moved closer to Angie and Taylor. She stood in front of a mirror, leaning against a chair, and stared at herself. There was a pimple on her left cheek and she fingered it, wishing she could hear what the two behind her were saying. Taylor's back was to her, she could see in the mirror, and Angie was talking very fast to him.

Lee turned to look at Ms. Earsall, who was sitting stiffly in her pink chair, her liver-spotted hands folded on her lap. Looking back into the mirror, Lee pulled her hair over her cheek, experimenting to see if it could cover the pimple. It did just barely, looking unnatural. Lee forgot about the pimple as she began to push and pull at her hair, thinking maybe it would look better if she tinted it blonde like Angie did to hers. She looked in the mirror, squinting a little because of the sun, to see Taylor trying to touch Angie's arm. She was pushing his hand away with one of her hands, the other trying to catch the tears in the corners of her eyes before they went down her cheeks.

Angie's blonde hair really sets off her eyes, Lee thought. She didn't think that it would go as well with brown hair, and her mother wouldn't like it if she dyed her hair. Her mother was always telling her that most brunettes would just give their right arm to have natural red highlights like she had. Her mother was always saying people would just give their right arms for this or that. When Lee complained that she was tired of washing people's hair, sick of the way her hands felt dried and wrinkled at the end of the day, her mother always gave her the same reply - Most girls would just give their right arm for a job like you have. Lee would think of how funny a one-armed shampoo girl would look and smiled a stretched smile at her mother.

Lee thought her mother was phony, the way she was always so sugary nice to everyone. She owned the hair salon herself and said to the women that came in how she felt like a mother hen, the way she watched over her girls. Her girls, she called her employees. Lee thought that sounded fake.

Turning around to see if Ms. Earsall was getting annoyed with the wait, Lee saw her mother walking out of the back room to the front. She quickly bent down to pick up a hair brush that had fallen on the floor. Kate turned off her hair-dryer, making Willy Nelson and the other girl's laughter seem louder. Lee heard the click of her mother's heels as she walked past. Jean and Sheryl became quiet for a quick moment. They were probably simultaneously drinking their Cokes.

Lee heard her mother saying hello to Taylor and then tell Angela to go back and start on Ms. Earsall. Angela walked past Lee and smiled at her. She had been crying, anyone could see that. Lee walked up to the counter where her mother and Taylor were standing. Her mother was saying in a high voice, "We haven't seen you here for awhile Taylor. Are things alright with you and Angela?"

Lee waited for Taylor to answer, hoping he wouldn't. Her mother was a revolving door of information, and she knew her mother had never really liked Taylor anyway. She never said why but always shook her head when she saw him and said she didn't like that one of her girls was seeing him. Whenever he came into the salon, his heavy, dirty workboots leaving a dust on the floor, she was pleasant

enough, but the minute he left she always handed Lee the broom and told her to sweep where he'd been standing.

"Sure, Mrs. Haker," he said, "Everything is fine with Angie. I guess I'll go and let her get to work."

He smiled at Lee and turned around to leave, but her mother said quickly, "How's your little sister, Taylor? She's thirteen now, isn't she? I can remember you at that age."

Taylor gave her the forced smile that so many people gave her and replied, half-turned away, "She's fine too, Mrs. Haker. I'll see you later."

Lee saw her mother's head bobbing up and down with Taylor's replies. Her mother gave him a big, pink smile when she said, "I remember that you used to mow my lawn for me. Amber doesn't happen to do that does she?"

"No, Mrs. Haker, she doesn't."

"Well, actually, you know Taylor," she was still dragging the smile out, "I've been thinking and I've decided, now with Lee working here and all, that I might need some help picking up the house a little." She paused, expectant.

In the song playing on the radio, the woman singing suddenly hit a high note and drew it out for several beats. Lee saw her mother's bright, vacant eyes watching Taylor turning slowly around to face her. He seemed to be counting to ten or something under his breath, Lee thought. He stepped back closer to the wall, the pale pink wall paper making his skin seem even darker.

"Well, I guess you could say I'm offering Amber a job with me, a sort of a housekeeper. I would pay her well, of course." Her voice lost some of its chirp, growing flat.

Lee saw that Taylor was angry. She wondered if he was just upset about Angie and this was making it worse or if he was really mad at her mother. Lee watched as he shook his head slowly and said in a quiet voice to her mother, "I don't think that Amber really needs a job as your maid. This isn't a family tradition, is it?" Lee's mother looked at him blankly. Looking from her mother to Taylor, Lee was confused.

Taylor continued on, "My mother worked as a house-maid for your mother when you were Amber's age, Mrs. Haker. I don't think she wants my sister to follow in her footsteps, if you get what I mean. Amber is too young to have a job now, and she doesn't need one," his voice was growing louder, "especially not as your maid."

He stood for a minute staring at Lee's mother and then at Lee. He shook his head and took a deep breath. Lee looked at her mother who was standing with her mouth slightly open and two bright spot of color burned on her cheeks under her rouge. Taylor turned around and left the salon, slamming the door so hard that the display shelf of some type of European hair styling spray fell over.

Lee and her mother stood there a minute and then Lee turned around to look at the rest of the store. Lee's mother walked over to the closet and took out the broom. She handed it to Lee and said, "I just don't understand. That colored boy has got a chip on his shoulder that I can't believe. I just offered his sister a fine job and he had to throw it back in my face like that. Some people are just incapable of gratitude."

She walked past Lee, muttering something about, "the colored ingrate." She walked past Jean and Sheryl to the back room. Jean was holding her soda can up close to her neck, sort of like you hold a rosary when you pray, Lee thought. Lee heard her mother say "Hi honey" to Ms. Earsall as she walked past her.

One of the girls turned on a blow-dryer and the radio was loudly proclaiming a sale at a furniture store. Lee looked out the big front window. She stood in the sun, a light sweat breaking out on her neck from its heat. As she stood looking, a bird suddenly flew straight into the window, bumping it with its head, and then veered away to the right. Lee stood, moving her slick palms up and down on the broom handle, and watched the bird circle across the street and then fly straight towards the window again. Her mother came up behind her as the bird slammed the glass.

"Would you look at that stupid bird," she said.

"Why," Lee asked, "Why is it doing that. It's going to hurt itself."

Lee's mother sighed. "It's because it's so sunny out. It only sees the reflection of the street in the glass. It thinks that it's flying across another street and can't realize it's just an illusion. Stupid bird," she said again as the bird repeated the action.

She walked over and kneeled down to begin picking up the display shelf. Lee turned towards the mirror and began sweeping. She looked up and thought about how she might tint her hair blonde. Behind her, in the mirror, she could see her mother on her knees on the floor, grabbing at the bottles of hair spray as they rolled away from her. The bird slammed into the glass again and Lee thought how she would just give her right arm to be anywhere else right then.

The Night Crowler Died

by Chris Griep

Ol' Crowler had been drinking the night he died. Crowler wasn't his real name, but that's what everyone always called him. I don't think anyone knew his real name, at least no one I ever talked to.

Crowler lived in a rundown shack on the lot behind my grandma's store. The shack had no electricity and Crowler had to pump his water from a well. People wondered why the county allowed him to live in such a place, but it had something to do with "grandfather" clauses. The county always said that there was nothing they could do about it.

My grandfather almost bulldozed Crowler's shack down a few years before the old drunk was killed. Grandpa was clearing land across the road for a neighbor and had gotten off the bulldozer to move something. Somehow, the gears slipped and the bulldozer started rolling across the road towards the shack. My grandfather managed to get on the bulldozer and stop it before it destroyed the place.

Crowler used to come into my grandma's store and buy beer. One of the problems with Crowler was that he couldn't talk too good and was hard to understand. It would take the ladies behind the counter a few minutes to figure out what he wanted. I guess his brain didn't work right because of all the booze he drank. A lot of times he wouldn't have enough money anyway.

It seemed Crowler was in trouble with the law almost every month. I remember one day; Crowler was drunk as usual and had gotten mad with another black man behind the store. The other man was about six inches and seventy pounds bigger than Crowler, so the old drunk staggered over to his shack and came back with an ax and started chasing the big guy around the trash dump. The big guy managed to pick up a large piece of pipe and then kept Crowler away from him by swinging the pipe at him whenever he got close. The police finally got there and took Crowler down to the jail. We all thought Crowler was gonna be gone a long time, but a week later he was back in the store, mumbling his order and buying more beer. Someone said they heard Crowler had been in jail for murder when he was younger, but my grandfather thought that was a bunch of hooey.

"The way I see it," he would always say, *"if he had been convicted of murder, they woulda' strung him up and not bothered putting him in jail. It's plain as day that nigger's no use to society."*

I can only recall talking to Crowler one time. It was a day when he was less drunk than usual. He noticed me looking at his limp and came over to tell me how he messed up his leg. I finally managed to figure out that a shell had ripped up his leg in World War I. I didn't get to hear the rest of his story because my mother called me away.

My mom was angry with me for talking to Crowler and told me never to speak to him again or she'd get my dad to whip me. A belt-whipping from my dad was the last thing I wanted, so I promised not to speak to Crowler again. I told my brother all about Crowler's war story, but he just laughed at me. He told me Crowler had hurt his leg in jail.

My brother Jim was two years older than me and thought he knew everything. He and I were always getting in fights about the stupidest little things. One time I told on him for sneaking out late at night. He beat the crap out of me for telling on him. After that, I decided not to tell on him any more. Instead, some nights I would wait a minute or two and then follow him out to see what he was doing. That's why we were both out on the night Crowler died.

A lot of times when my brother snuck out, he would go down to our grandma's store. He would usually meet some of his friends there and they would sit around and smoke and drink. My brother got mad if he caught me following him, but sometimes his friends would call me over for a drink of their beer. Some nights, when they got up enough nerve, they would throw rocks at Crowler's shack and then run like hell.

The night Crowler died was one of those hot, humid July nights, when you just lay in bed tossing and sweating. I heard Jim slip out the window around one in the morning, so I decided to follow him since I wasn't getting much sleep anyway. He headed down the road toward the store and I crept along behind.

I think I saw the flames shooting from the roof of Crowler's shack a second or two before my brother did, but I still wasn't able to get out of the way in time as he came running back down the road. He ended up sprawled out in

the middle of the road and I was sent flying into the honeysuckle bushes along the edge. As I was trying to get out of the bushes, he jumped up, yelled at me to stay where I was, and started running for our house again.

I didn't listen to a word he said. Instead I got up and ran towards the shack to see what was happening. As I got closer, I caught a glimpse of some white shapes running into the woods on the other side of the clearing. I didn't get a better look because something whizzed past my head and I dove into the bushes.

I had just crawled out of the brush when my father and brother came driving up in our old GMC pickup truck. As I stood up, I glanced toward the shack and saw that it was completely covered in flames. My father hopped out and looked at the shack for a second. Then he told me to get in the truck and wait there with my brother. The fire trucks got there about seven or eight minutes later, but by then it was too late for them to rescue Crowler. The fire marshal said Crowler must have dropped a cigarette onto his bed. No one bothered to mention Crowler didn't smoke.

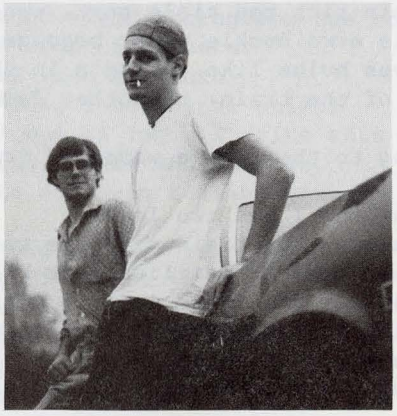
A few months later, my brother and his friends were arrested for nearly murdering a black boy in town. Most of my brother's friends got off with suspended sentences and parole, but my brother and a couple of the older guys were given five-year jail sentences. A lot of people in my area were outraged that they received such a harsh judgement, but it was a new judge. Rather than going to jail for a few months and getting a quick parole, Jim and his two buddies decided to run off to Alabama. My grandfather said it would have been better if he had let the bulldozer go that day.

Crack In The

'70-'71

Olivia Lovelace & Alice Stone

'72-'74



Cliff Foster & Zeke Osbourne

'75-'76

Vincent Brody & Dominick Garcia

'77-'79

Marcia Glassman & Barbara Livingston

Train to Vermont

Americans Can Never Go Home
the man wearing a baseball cap says
from his rich red aisle seat, watching
my pale arms buckle under baggage.
His eyes bulge like a frog's in the dull gold
light of the train; the other faces blank in
sleep,
rocking to the secure waves of travel.

Only he and I and two lovers
look alive; the train might be rushing
the dead home to families left behind,
and we four survivors left to witness
the violent expressions of those who wait
on snowy platforms to receive again their blood,
folding the cold bundles close like children.

But this is not a time of genocide,
and we who have money for tickets
do not fear our government; we fear
each other and the bulky suitcases overhead
and the constant tick tick tick
of watches, and the flash of wild
in a stranger's searching pupil.

The black mirror windows lock us in together,
allowing nothing to be seen
of the land mysteriously sliding by.
But perhaps nothing is there to see,
except the barbed wire city limit dumps,
the fields of tires and car skeletons
and tired tobacco barns sinking to the frozen
ground.

What I do see, I see too much:
the persistent gloss of my own eyes
reflected back; this could be intimate for some,
but frightens me and delivers me to the words
Americans Can Never Go Home,
told by the voices of the dead.

Still, the train flies forward with its cargo
of limp sleepers and sleepy lovers
who ignore the patriot, as I want to,
pretending our enemies are visible.

RECYCLING ENERGY

I

The movie erupts; the tracking is off.
a woman's face splinters naturally
in the jiggling picture, her image disappears
square by square, while we recall years earlier,
learning in dark classrooms smelling of iodine,
that our energy has already been created.
Here, a scientist's nightmare: on uncensored
celluloid, an actress' resurrection.

We leave when the final pictures flicker
from the screen in single file.
The audience follows, slow and heavy
as if they had grown forty years older.
Outside, the crowd evaporates, instantly.
Attention falls like firework ashes
back to our still faces,
and our eyes wilted from moving.
We go grocery shopping.

II

I finally speak with my blood
one evening, across the telephone lines.
He wonders like me, about disappearance,
probing his inner arm.
He believes in radio waves, differential
equations, molecules, and tells me
sister, if energy goes somewhere else,
you can get there too.

I imagine my fingers along his
fork-holed vein, surfaced above gold
and rotten skin. He recites his lines
but the words drop from his voice
like the soft shavings of driftwood
falling away under the touch of a knife,
a persistent blade carving at the touchables.

Poetry by Erin Page

JUNE IN THE DARK

The summer patio gatherings;
the drinkers adjusting their lawnchairs
to stare at Orion.
Only Orion. The warrior!
Really only Orion's belt:
the glorious trinity.
Who could not see
the three regal lights
shining down for us?

You and I were there, watching
the cool marble eyes salute above.
The ice circled the glasses
like soft laughter,
and the electric lights
spread a hollow yellow glow
unlike anything living. Perhaps
this is why we filled the garden
like statues, because nothing alive
belonged to us. Neither did the word
June belong to us,
nor the light of three stars,
but still we wished for a deed
like a wedding band; a promise
of owning something that is not ours,
or anyone's. Never were we eager
to imagine others breathed the night too,
but being the only ones alive was worse.

Why then were we statues?
You, the lion, and I
in the sweet dark breeze
asking you to speak to me again
like the living do, or even
to keep your religious quiet, and
just touch my hand, just once,
like the living do when books
and porcelain mugs are heavy and solid cold,
to touch my light hand
would make the silence simple

as Orion, the perennial warrior,
his brilliant trinity:
Bright boy under the sky
swollen with light, when we were statues
who did not see your eyes
asking for everything?

The Night Museum

Your leg sinks in shadows,
glows a lightening blue when carbeams fall
through the window and photograph the confusion
of your ankle with the sheets.
Resting in the wads of cloth
the ankle is like a nocturnal animal
waiting in clumps of fog. I write this now;
in sunlight the dreams and wakings
will fold into a single teasing memory.

I watch over you in the green tea dark,
the fan whispering cool liquid
across our bodies. A blanket
reaches off the bed to the floor,
a juice glass is overturned,
a strangled towel asleep
like a dog at the foot of the bed.
Our props create a museum and each
sleeps with gravity, the possessive lover.

In my dream, I wade to the window:
bird carcasses collect in the yard like acorns,
while inside I watch our bodies deflate and rise
again
captured in underexposed photographs
captured in oil and marble.

Poetry by Erin Page

At Grandmother's in Florida

Sis carried the coconut as we
Ran barefoot across the hot sand.
She gave it to Father and we
Picked the prickles from our feet.
Father got a knife.
He brought it down on the coconut,
Slicing through the hairy shell
To a milksweet middle.

Grandmother said,
"Look Tommy a . . ."
We leapt up screening the beach
And saw the crocodile's knotted eye head
Resting above the water.
Can we go! Can we!
But Grandmother,
"Tommy tell the children to . . ."
We slumped back down.

Father brought us some coconut.
I bit in milksweet, but swallowed hard.
Sis went back for another piece.

Leaving a Highschool Football Game

Jingle Jangle
On the grassy cracked cold cement.
Cool man slick thinks,
"I'm not stoppin' for that stuff.
I ain't gonna stoop for no dime-nickel-penny."
Little brother comes up right behind him and says,
"If I find it. I keep it."
"If I find it! I keep it!"
He says,
And scoops up the dime-nickel-penny.
He holds it up for his friend to see
Then secures it tight in his hand, and thinks
"I can get me a piece of sour candy down to the Ames'es."

POETRY BY
JOHN BLAKELOCK

Ode to my Grandmother.

My Grandmother speaks dog language
She understands each whine of our bitch.
She's a seamstress, a politic gossip-
Every secret stowed in a stitch.
Of course the television is far more tactless
Than her Harlequin romances could be-
(She's got stacks of them long as my legs).

When I would wear tattered clothes to school
She'd scream and spit bloody hell, bloody hell.
She's got a Scottish tumor in her skull
That warps her words into plaid clouds.
Every suit she'd sewed me was pink (or atrocious orange)
I was mistaken for daughter somewhere.
Still, she's got a whip needle wit.

One day the laborador bowled her over
We thought concussion, concussion.
But even after a revoked driving license,
Her hearing and sight reposessed,
She's a solitary princess of a past
I've forgotten to remember.
She's got a nomadic memory:
When we watch the tennis the instant replay
Is as exciting for her as the first time.
"Look," she'd say, "he did it again".

Guitar Cubism

1. Analytic

Two string plucking melancholy
Stripped into diagonal melody
A blues background in four fifths time
Peg in corner, ascent the frets: climb
Strummed without harmony
Acoustic allegorical theory
If colored notes, foreground all
Depth immersed in vibrato.

2. Synthetic

Side view is extremely
Painful reminder of a woman's hips.
The throat of the instrument is
A central focus,
The heart home hope
From which these winds arise.
These frets are brief metal ribs
With wiry hair strung taut
Across the agape soul spot
Curved between fragile lips.
When this mute mistress speaks
In any sporadic direction
Its music is seductive deception.

POETRY BY
BRUCE HAMILTON

OLD MAN GRAVY

By Mike Sapp

Myself, I don't know much about what it all meant, or how to tell a story you'd be interested in, but I can tell you the thing which happened to me when I was still digging graves out down in Saint Mary's The Blessed Virgin graveyard. They have a lovely cemetery out there. Small, but that keeps it nicer that way. More personal.

I've been trying to piece meaning together out of it. All it means to me is I keep wanting cigarettes when I think about it, even though I quit eleven years ago on advice from my doctor. Technically. I count it as eleven as long as Vallerie doesn't catch me at it, and I don't think she will with the window left open. Got the fan blowing out, too.

I'm digging somewhere on the lower edge, out by the stone wall that separates the graves from Edison Avenue. This old fellow in a jacket sort of like mine came out of the office and started up the hill, one hand in his pocket and one hand holding a smoke, just looking at all the headstones and stooping here and there to read the more interesting ones. He was swinging his head from one side to the other real slowly, looking at everything from the right to the left then from left to right. As he got closer I can see he was wearing an odd black hat and had a bit of a limp in one of his legs. Also he had these thick black rimmed glasses that looked like the sort they wear when they're carving the slabs of marble. He limped his way up, and, still coming towards me, sort of smiled and nodded and from the way he did it I can tell he meant to talk.

Me, I prefer to do work when I'm supposed to be working. A lot of the younger guys stop digging as soon as the boss goes down the road for something, but I find that sort of wrong. I don't know. But I'll talk to people if they come up and I have the time. So he limped up and stuck out his hand and said Hello, my name is Mister Something Gravy, I wonder if you can answer me some questions.

I say I'll try but I can't guarantee him anything.

He took out a folded piece of paper and handed it to me. It was the forms they give out for a plot. He asked me to show him exactly where it was. I'm almost done the grave I'm working on so I figure I can spare him the time. I stick my shovel down in the soil so it's handle is in the air and walk over to where the form says the plot will be. He followed me slowly because he kept reading the stones as he went.

"Here it is," I say. It didn't look like much now, just normal ground. There was a grave to the right and one to the left a few plots off. "32 F."

"Which way," he asked.

"Headstone faces that way, toward the road."

He turned around and knelt by where the stone would be and looked out over the hill. "Hm," said old mister Gravy. His cigarette was almost gone so he stubbed it out it the dirt by his feet. He stayed there crouched for a few seconds. "I'm sorry," he said all at once, "I don't think I know your name."

This is my fault, obviously, because I didn't tell him mine when he told me his. "Sorry. Jack Harnichick. I'm a grave-digger." I know this is obvious, too. I'm just so used to people asking who I am then what I do in that order. Some people are surprised when I say my job. I guess surprised is the word for it. I used to wonder if I should put it off, but it's nothing to be ashamed of. Vallerie says there's dignity in any job.

Old man Gravy was already digging around in his jacket for another smoke, and as he fumbled it together he asked if I wanted one. I tell him no, I never smoke them. And then he was trying to get up again but he was having a bit of trouble with his one leg. He was half way up, tettering, and I'm wondering if I should help him or not. While I'm wondering he got upright, patted down the pockets on his coat, and nodded. The match he threw down exactly where the plot will be.

Even upright, his one leg kept him from standing level. "I wonder," he said, "If you can show me the oldest grave?"

I take him to the oldest grave I can think of. It's way back in a corner of the yard that we don't really own anymore, surrounded by thickets and brambles. I grab my shovel on the way by to cut a path back to the grave. Randolf Kree : 1760-1792. Gravy whistled when he saw it. "1792," he said. "That almost two hundred years ago. How do you think he's getting along now?"

I laugh at this but as I recall he didn't. I offer to show him the youngest one and he said that was my next question. We retrace our steps back out through the brambles and follow the stone wall around to the more recent section. It's right up against the wall, about two plots from the one I was digging, the youngest one, and you can hear traffic right over the wall. The mound hasn't even begun to sink yet and there are fresh flowers from the 2:00 service. My boot-print is still on the top of the mound. I do that. I don't know why - when I get done with the shoveling work on a grave I stamp my boot down on top to leave a mark.

"Kelly Koore," he read. "Did you know her?"

It's a strange question to ask someone. "No," I say.

"Did you see her funeral?"

"No, but I saw the burial," I say. Sometimes

people think the funeral is the burial and sometimes they think the burial is the funeral. You tell me why. Then he asked me if there were many people there and when I say sure he asks how many. He seemed real interested so I thought it out to about twenty, twenty-five people. A good showing.

"Thirty," I say.

"Thirty," he repeated thoughtfully.

I tell him maybe I should be getting back to work but he shook his head at that and said he only had two more questions. One was where did we keep our shovels and the other was would it be possible for him to dig out the plot he showed me. I tell him it can't be done until I get the slip for it to be dug. His hands were shaking real bad as he dropped his one cigarette and dug for the next. When the match glow hit his hands it reminds me it's getting darker and I get off in a few minutes.

"Why is that?" he asked. It's hard to watch how terrible his hands are shaking but mercifully he gets his cigarette lit and he can hide them in his pockets again. I tell him he can't dig it out early because there's no telling, obviously, when the job will need to be done and in the meantime it would fill up with rainwater and turn rotten at the bottom. I guess that's the real reason. But of course I never thought about it.

He only tells me he's a wood worker and he thinks it's best to finish every last part of a project, and that's the only way you can ever really own anything is to take care of all the details yourself. "There's not much you can own anymore," he said. "I mean *own*."

I asked him what he meant but felt bad about it when he said "I mean there's not much that's even true. To have a notion to follow is a comfort."

For some reason I say my mother was an Irish Catholic.

"Did it help?"

"It helped her," I say. I'm struck by the truth and sadness in this, and how it's getting colder.

"That's good," he said. "But what about you?"

I turn my shoulder to him and go back over to the grave I was digging on. I put in a few strokes. He was still standing there all crooked up, waiting for for to answer. Then I stick the shovel in upright again and I tell him I don't understand what he's going on about, why all the questions and why somebody would dig a grave out early and why and old man would even hang around graves talking to diggers.

"Sorry," he said. I could see how his glasses were smudged with dirt and slightly crooked, and how thick they were. So thick they messed up how his eyes looked. Also this piece of his hair that stuck out from under his hat kept flying around in the wind. I wanted to tuck it behind his ear so much and get it out of the way that at first I was annoyed and then just sorry I was annoyed at all. "I'm sorry," is what he was saying. "I'm just sort of out of place. Everybody around here is into this or that. Me, I don't find much in most things. Take television. When I was out to my daughter's they never did anything else."

"Do you like 'Cop Story'?" I ask him. It's my favorite.

"I don't like much of anything," he said gloomily.

I went out on a limb and asked him to name three things he liked.

"Cigarettes," he said. "Menthols. That's one. I like finishing what I start and I like making what I need with my own hands."

"The last two don't count," I say. "They're not *things*. Name actual things, that you can touch."

Old man Gravy hunched his shoulders and then relaxed them. At first I didn't even realize it was a shrug and he was saying he couldn't think of any.

"Sorry, don't worry about it," I say.

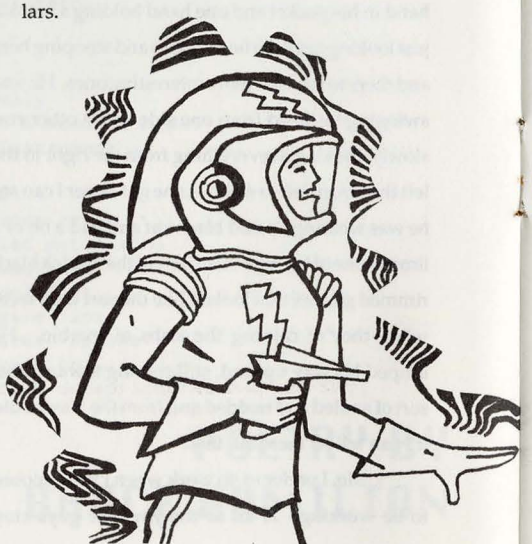
Then the conversation took an odd turn. "What do you think about death," he asked me. His bent up old hands flapped their way out of his pockets and clamped themselves, one to my arm and one around the shovel. It startles me. "I don't know," I say. "What do you think about religion?" He was hissing. "I don't know," I say. His hands fall loose and he looked so let down and defeated I tell him I'm sorry.

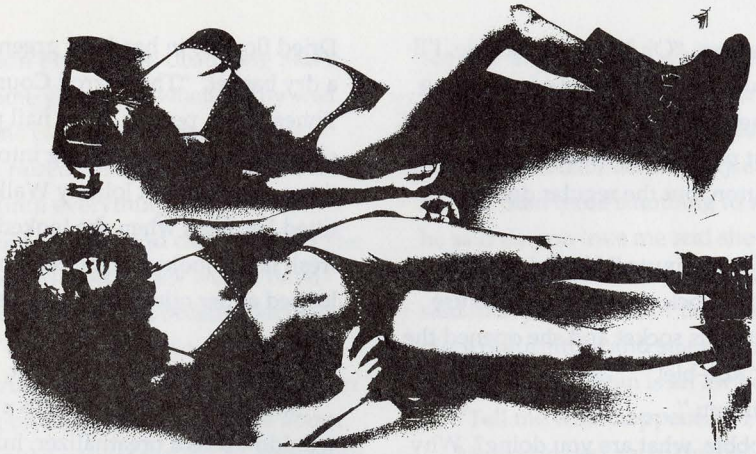
"I'm sorry," I say, "I just never thought about all that before." He nods, and I don't know why but when he does you can't imagine how terrible I feel. The sun's going down below the bank roof now and it's getting more chilly. Then I do something that seems odd when I say it but it feels right at home out there. "Are you dying?" I ask him.

Old man Gravy reached out one of his hands, just this once it was still as can be, and he grabbed ahold of my earlobe real gentle, and gave it two tiny downward tugs. "I do like to finish what I start," he said. Then he asked me how much longer I was planning on working at Saint Mary's, and when I said I didn't know he asked me a personal favor.

I didn't know until about three weeks later when I cemented in the headstone that his name wasn't 'Gravy' at all- it was 'Granvy'. The way he said it, I thought it was Gravy.

So that's my story for your Amateur Summer Writing Contest. It fits in with the category "Conversation with a Stranger". I don't really write much, but I hope you find this story good enough to be published and also win the ten dollars.





Needs Repair

by Rob Thompson

If you are not good in this life, you will return as a hellgrammite in the next one. Judging by the number of hellgrammites, there must have been billions of very bad people throughout time, and each one of their miserable reincarnated lives is worth twenty cents as bait at Old Reisterstown Bait and Tackle. I catch them. It doesn't pay well but I try.

Here's what happens. Nero or Hitler or somebody dies and excretes this soul which floats toward heaven because it thinks that there is a chance that God got this soul mixed up with the soul of Mahatma Ghandi. On the way, it passes a sign with a reflective green background and white letters. The sign says, "Nirvana, 56 mi."

When they get there, God says, "Stop! Now you know, I'm Hindu, and you wouldn't believe it. What a shame. For all you've done, you are to be reincarnated as a hellgrammite." Finally, Hitler will find out what a hellgrammite is as his arms and legs disappear, he turns black and his body shrinks down to a bug a little bit smaller than the length and thickness of a Pez dispenser. His skin is moist, his head sprouts a pair of mandibles for grasping food and behind the head are three pairs of legs. Behind them is a tail of sorts with all these black protrusions which look like legs but they are gills. In the movies, Khan puts one into Mr. Spock's ear, but in real life it just clings upside down to the underside of streambed rocks. Doug will buy hundreds of them.

In June, the Patapsco smells like moss and sounds like a clapping audience. I stoop down in the middle of a shin-deep riffle, twenty-five dollar bills wide. The fingers of my left hand poke under the downstream side of a rock. My right hand holds the handle of a net. The mouth of the net is as wide as a dinner plate and anything larger than a pea will not slip through the mesh. Redirected water gurgles around the rock as I pull it up against the current and a patch of brown boils up. The silt trapped underneath all this time is washed away, along with some dead leaves and hellgrammites. I see two bugs stuck in the net when I pull it out of the water.

After twenty minutes, the net is heavy with debris. On the bank, I pull my shirt off, my back as warm as my feet are cold. The net looks full of dirt but hellgrammites give themselves away when they begin to crawl, and I drop them, one by one, into an empty plastic five gallon bucket where they try to pinch each other or crawl three inches up the side and fall back in. Twenty-eight. One crayfish, throw him back. Cover the bucket with the shirt. They don't like the sun. You can hear them squirming around. This is what I came here for.

Miss Jenny told me that when she was a hippie, she went to India. Whatever she found there, she must have taken, because she talks slow now and she's not easy to hear. I used to baby-sit her strange kids last year, when I thought myself a hippie.

She says, "There was this cockroach, you see. And I, um, I was just, you know, kinda standin there in customs. . . line. . . in New Delhi. Ah. Well, it just crawled around and then, I donno, just crawled andumm well just, nobody, you know, stepped on it. It sortof just crawled around, youknow, all these feet. It's the religion, what with, I guess, a different kind of God. You know, they don't kill."

Mom and Bill's marriage crawled around my grandparents' feet. It crawled around the neighbors' feet. It

crawled around my feet and my brothers' feet. It crawled around the slow horses' hooves at Pimlico. It crawled into a glass of scotch and water and out of the glass and down to Mr. Don's house for some more. Nobody stepped on it. It wasn't the Catholic thing to do, or maybe nobody wanted to mess up their shoes. Everyone creates a God in their own likeness. Flamingos worship a one-legged god.

Mom is divorced now, Bill is gone, but the bug still haunts the house that the courts describe as "theirs." It haunts in different ways too. Last night I saw it again. I saw it in another man, reincarnated in a boyfriend weaker and less cunning, unmarried, pathetic, and therefore explosive.

I drove home last night because I needed some money. Mom's new Honda was in the driveway. Before she bought it, she told me something about getting license plates that said, "M FREE." I told her, "don't," and she didn't, but not because I told her not to. She just doesn't always get around to things. She likes slogans, though. She thinks of them when she's drunk, at times when a slogan is the right thing to have. New Year's: "Nineteen Niney, Get Off Your Hiney." Nobody laughed. I began to think some time ago that maybe she needs repair. I need repair, too.

It was ten o' clock when I got there. The kitchen light was on and the window framed a picture of her sitting at the table, painting the nails of one hand with a tiny brush in the other and laughing into the phone, the receiver pinned between her tilted head and raised shoulder.

Through the closed window, I could hear her say, "Oh Mom, it's Robbie, I'll call you back." Something was wrong with the storm door. It didn't click shut, so I just pulled it open without pushing any button, but the regular door was locked.

"Wait a minute," I heard, and the little chain lock she never used to use slid out of its socket and she opened the door, "Rob-bie!"

"Himum."

"Robbie, what are you doing? Why didn't you call?" She hugged me without touching me with her hands because the nails were wet and I kissed her on the cheek.

"The line was busy," I said. Actually, I didn't call. I don't call anymore before I come home. The line is usually busy anyway, and if I do call before I leave, it makes me reconsider. If I called, I'd never visit. She smelled scotchy.

She just sat back down and looked at me and smiled, which really meant she was drunk and was glad to have an audience. "So," she said, "are you staying for the weekend?"

"No, just tonight probly. Gotta get back." I always say "probly" about everything with her. This way, when an argument starts, I can say "maybe," so there aren't so many bombs.

"Where's Stan?" I asked. Stan is the man who lives with her. Sometimes they act like a couple, then they get out of bed and into a fight and - Stan is the man who lives with her.

"Oh," she waved her hands and pursed her lips unconvincingly. "Who knows?" her pitch rose on 'knows.' Unconvincingly. She does. "Who cares?" she waves them again. Unconvincingly. She does.

I sat down at the table. Placemats. Dried flowers in hard dry green foam in a dry basket. "The Carroll County Times." Salt, pepper, open nail polish, a short glass with ice melting into something cheaper than Johnny Walker. She tilted her head when she looked at her fresh hand, looked at me, said nothing, looked at her other hand, used silence as bait.

"So, um, what's new?" I bit.

She just looked at me with a gaze that wouldn't pass a breathalizer, hummed 'Umm umm' and began to put the cap back on the nail polish. She's not like this. She knows she's not like this. She knows I know she's not like this. She knows that I am going to ask.

"What's wrong, Mom?" to a woman who has been drinking, and I did.

"What's new?" she bites back. "The old asshole is up to his tricks again. I got a letter from his lawyer today, that's what's wrong." She stood up. "He's suing me for back child support because I'm suing him for back house payments and Stan the man is pissed off because I'm pissed off." She picked up her glass, started toward the counter and stopped, turned around and looked at me, "He wouldn't even let me talk to Jon."

I thought she might start to cry now, news is never good. I start, "Godd-"

"You're goddam right 'goddamit,'" she continued, meaning not to cry. " Who am I, his mother or something? We'll see how that works out when I talk to *my* lawyer Monday." She was, no, she is Jon's mother.

I stared at the nail polish bottle as she clinked around, fixing a new drink. Then there's the clock hanging above the telephone. It's exactly right twice a day, remembering exactly when the battery died inside some weeks or months ago.

It wouldn't have been dead long had it died some years ago, when Kathy was what one calls an earth mother.

She raised children and cleaned the house until everything was perfect to a fault. She cleaned and cleaned. Had she met Lady Macbeth, they would have become close friends, because Mom would've found some way to remove that "cruel spot." Then I could see them talking on the phone every night about who looked ugly at the last PTA meeting or who did what to whom on TV and Mom and Mrs. Macbeth would insist that their children should be friends. Jason, Jon and I would always try to beat up the Macbeth kids and the friendship that never was would end when one of us would tie a firecracker to the tail of the Macbeth's dog, Rex. Things didn't exactly go like this, the names were changed.

She would yell at me for running across the foyer and leaving scuff marks. While she re-mopped the floor, I would sit in my room and fantasize about dumping wheelbarrow loads of swamp mud on the floor. I dreamed that the whole place would forever smell like methane and algae and that she would see it and say "I see your point, I'm sorry I've always been so clean." It wouldn't happen then.

She returned to the table and sat down. I'm not sure, but I think I sensed a gloss creeping over her eyes. She didn't continue. Where was this wit of hers? Where did it go?

"MOM, WHERE'S STAN?"

"Oh, Robbie, I don't know." Her voice began to crack, her eyes squinted and her lips wrinkled, but the cry came out anyway. "He..." she fell silent again and shrugged her shoulders. Things never change. I knew what happened. They got in a fight because Stan is jealous and she told him to leave her alone, and he said Kath, tell me why and she said no Stan there's nothing to say, and he said do you love me and she said something that was not the answer, he said fuck you and hit or threw some piece of furniture and she said Stan get out and he did. Stan is an away drinker.

"Tell me what happened," I said.

Mom crinkled a napkin and dabbed her eyes with it, and told me what happened. I was right, and I said, "Mom, I thought you kicked him out for good last time this happened." Last time I was here, this same thing happened, and in the morning I had to talk Stan out of throwing an ashtr-

"ROB!" she screamed. "WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU?"

"What do you mean what is wrong with you?" "You know damn well what I mean." She wasn't crying any more. I looked at the clock again. It couldn't tell me what to say. I looked at the scuffed floor, it looked back, blank, and the window, too - blank.

"Goddammit, look at me." She reached out with her right hand and grabbed my face with all her eighty seven pound might and pinched it so that my mouth couldn't say the words that my brain couldn't think.

"For one thing," I murmured, " you shouldn't 've. . ."

"NOT ME, I didn't ask you to tell me my own problems. I said YOU. what is wrong with *you* ?"

I pulled away from her, looked to the window, but she was in the window, too, the floor, the clock, the house - there she was, and, what was it I don't know. What was it? I don't know. Something began to bounce between my ears.

"Rob, you are cold," she said quietly. She gave up. I wouldn't tell her. But she gave up, and as soon as she gave up, she won. My hands started to quiver, and I looked at her. I looked at her for me, and there I was, a little bit blurry and then I started to cry.

"I know you," she said. "I know you because I love you. You need repair, too. I can read your mind. You're not that smart. Remember," she smiled, "I'm your mother."

I was helpless, turning, dizzy. I saw streams as streams not twenty-five dollar bills wide. I saw hellgrammites as regular old insects. No Hitler, no Lady Macbeth, no dirty floor, and I am here to see her, not for money, none of those things. Just me and my mother.

Rob started to cry again, he cried as if he lost his luggage in some faraway airport. He wished for a third person to say exactly why he was sorry. To tell him. To tell his mother. But it was just me. "Mom, I'm sorry." As long as she reads my mind, and that will be forever, she will know more than I do.

We were honest. She told me not to stay. She needed to be alone with Stan when he returned. "This is it," she said, "I have to talk with him." I wondered if. . ."believe me," she said, "I'm all right. Are you?"

"Yes. Thank you, Mom." I hugged her for all our sadnesses. She would be all right.

I slept in the truck last night, next to the stream. It's wider in some places and skinnier in others. Wait, I don't need these bugs. Turn the bucket over. Watch them fall to the water and squiggle back to safety. Time to go home.

Being Tailed

— Matthew B. Shields

Fueled on twice-cut cocaine and Bacardi, Steve Repass fired six .38 caliber slugs into his girlfriend's husband's dog pen, then ran a quarter mile through a corn field, in the darkness, to his Yamaha, stuffed the pistol into his jacket, kickstarted the motorcycle and rode off down the gully, up the embankment, across the pasture, through a gate and along a row of trees.

"Holy shit! Holy shit!" Steve, totally exhilerated and driving top speed down gravel backroads, knew it wouldn't be smart to drive very far in his condition, especially with a gun and a rainbow assortment of narcotics in his pockets. Brown wouldn't rightly guess who shot his dogs and call out an A.P.B. in the next few hours, but being caught near his house tonight wouldn't be good if Brown had called the sheriff...it wouldn't be good at all. He knew it would be a cleaner get away going cross country, no cops and Brown couldn't follow. Brown was sure to know who killed his dogs, but Steve had an ace-in-the-hole alibi.

"Whoo-Wee! I can see Old Brown's face now! Sheeeit!" he screamed to himself. The bike tore down the road spitting up gravel and dirt behind it, through farms and corn fields.

Steve came to a locked gate. He gunned it right along the fencerow. Maybe another gate ahead, he thought.

Cedar Stump-Bounce-Headlight-Tree-Balance? Steve was thrown sideways, holding the bars/brakes. A steel knot caught his thigh, the weight and momentum of the motorcycle had him sliding down the barbedwire as if on a zip line, each of sixty-two barbs ripping off chunks of meat and bone. THWACK! He smacked the fence post, splintering it off at the base and dragging it with him, rolling in the wire. The bike shot free and turned 180 degrees before it fell, puttering twenty feet from where he had come to rest.

"Oh, shit!" Steve looked up from where he landed to see the dust settling in front of the bike's headlight as the engine died. He tried to free his tangled arm from the wire. He knew he was tore up real bad. Feeling down to his legs his waist was soaked in thick black blood. Bending up he saw burning embers on his pants, at the ankle, where the exhaust had burnt him. He didn't feel it. Looking up to his thighs he thought his right leg was completely torn off because it was dangling off of him at such an extreme angle. Broken and half sawed off, barely strung together with a few tendons and some skin. "Oh, shit!"

Steve began crawling over to the Yamaha dragging his leg behind him, barbed wire still clawing at him. He crawled into the beam of the headlight and surveyed the severity of his wounds. He screamed. He puked. He cried. The pain was becoming more real with every motion and he was growing weaker. He pulled himself around the bike, unhooked a bungi-strap from the seat and tied it around his thigh, tightening it until the bleeding slowed significantly. Reaching into his jacket, he pulled out a quarter ounce of cocaine and sprinkled it onto the raw cross section of his leg. Numbed it right up, but now his head hurt. He realized many of his ribs were broken, took his gun out, to take pressure off them, and threw it. He ate a handful of pills and began contemplating his next move.

Steve crawled. I'll bet Brown is out right now looking for me, he thought. Killed his best damn bird dogs. Brown's gonna find me. Fucked his wife and stole her away, I did. Betcha Brown's there at the side of the road watching me. Watching me crawl and slowly die. He's there all right, with a 12 gauge, pumped and loaded, waiting for me. Waiting for me to crawl up to him. Waiting for me to beg, beg for my life. He began to cry, still crawling.

Steve stopped to rest. He looked back at his leg all busted up. The thing had twisted around, coiling on its last threads to the body as he had dragged it. He looked back at the head light. Seems like I've crawled farther than that, he thought. Brown's lady will probably be out looking for me sooner or later. If Brown don't find her first and beat the hell out of her again. He crawled. Yeah, Brown'll find her. He'll find us both. "Come on, Brown! Kill me. Get it over with!"

Hours passed, Steve kept crawling down the path and the headlight was now out of view. The road can't be far, he thought. He crawled and his leg kept spinning on the tendons. It got so caked with clotted blood and dirt that he couldn't put anymore coke on it. The bungi-strap kept coming loose and the bleeding would start up again. Steve decided to take his leg off, seeing it was slowing him down and would eventually twist itself off anyway. He scraped at the tendons between two rocks but couldn't cut through, they were too tough. "Goddammit!," he said in frustration, "I wanted to hand ol' Brown my leg....Looks like you ain't gettin' it, Brown!" He crawled on.

The sun was coming up and Steve decided not to look at himself anymore, only crawl. He could eventally see a road through the rows of corn he was in. A car zipped by. Kept crawling.

He reached the edge of the road and waited. Tried to take his leg off again. Cried. Then a station wagon passed and pulled up on the side of the road about a hundred yards away.

"Come on, Brown. Come and get me," he whispered, right before passing out.

Blast. Bark and Blast again. Brown awoke and dove to the floor, taking most of his blankets with him. His dogs were barking... Blast. He ran his fingers over his ribs and down his flanks. No holes. Blast. Brown scurried across the floor to his closet. Crawled inside and pulled his Ithaca out of its case. Kli-chunk, he pumped it. He sat and stared out into the darkness of his room, shotgun poised to kill.

Brown awoke the next morning in the same position, tired from trying to stay awake all night still too scared to get up and see what had happened.

SUPER*FRESH

By Sandy Hiortdahl

There stands this Amish guy at the frozen breakfast aisle, a kid on either side of him, a boy and a girl. I'm hunched beside Stacey, who's trying to get some teenage boy with one side of his head shaved to try a sample of the New Improved Creamy Cheese and Pepperoni Spread on a cracker. He doesn't want it, but finally she convinces him to try just one "itty bitty ol' taste of it." He does, shrugs, moves on to the cookie aisle. This Creamy Cheese and Pepperoni Spread is no different than the stuff in jars in the dairy case, the only "improvement" being the squirt bottle with flourescent green letters; consumers don't know that, of course. What we're doing is a marketing survey, which is what we do in SUPER*FRESH stores up and down the coast. Stacey is good at it, flashes her smile at passing shoppers like a hitchhiker who needs a ride, always remembers to mark their response on the chart, keeps just enough cheese and crackers on display (or whatever it is we're testing that day). I'm not good at it, won't even eat the stuff myself. With some hesitation, the Amish guy opens the glass freezer door. When the cold hits him, he pulls his chin in as though both surprised and somehow insulted. It strikes me as funny.

Stacey is answering the questions of a girl wearing a sweatshirt with the motto of the local university on it. You can tell the girl is a student by the way she phrases her questions, bartering for the 'A': what percentage of the calories come from polyunsaturated fats?; is 'low sodium' a literal or a comparative description? You can tell that Stacey majored in advertising by the way she answers, calm but sure of her facts, meanwhile handing cracker after cracker to the sweatshirt girl. As for me, I majored in history, and only landed the job because a distant uncle belongs to the SUPER*FRESH union, only took the job because it was better than what I was doing before, working in a greenhouse. That's the only kind of job there is where I come from, greenhouses and dairy farms. So I packed my bags and moved to the city so that my parents would think they got some value out of the hard-earned dollars they invested in my degree. Maybe they were sad to see me go, I don't know. Dad talked about building us our own greenhouse and raising daffodils and snapdragons, but he said it with a half-smile and a faraway look in his eyes, and my bags were already packed. Day after day I put up the "TRY SOME!" display stand, and at night I stay in motels. While Stacey investigates the local nightclubs for "action," I lay awake on the crisp, disinfected sheets and look out at a sky that is orange from neon lights.

"Look at that, will ya?" Stacey says, and from the inflection of her whisper I know that there are no consumers near the stand. She gives a low whistle, points at the Amish guy. "I could teach him a few tricks that'd make him give up the farm." I nod. That's probably true. She taught the District Supervisor a few tricks that moved her up from "Assistant Marketing Research Technician" (my title) to "Managing Marketing Research Analyst." I didn't infer this— she told me one night when she got back from a nightclub, giggling from too many amaretto sours.

I looked again at the Amish guy, my view partially blocked by a woman in leather pants at the low-cal ice cream door. An old man in a motorized wheelchair sped down the aisle, his gnarled hand jerking on the control stick as nimbly as any kid playing Nintendo. The woman turned too quickly, collided with the wheelchair and for a moment she and the old man stared at each other as though stunned by this sudden human contact. Neither said a word, and then, maybe prompted by the drone of the overhead voice which promised "excellent values on 100% pure turkey hot dogs in aisle ten," they inched away from each other and continued down the aisle, past the Amish guy. Stacey didn't see the collision, was busy telling a housewife in a Springsteen T-shirt about the wonderful "no mess no fuss no worry" squirt bottle.

The Amish guy didn't notice it either, was studying a carton of cholesterol free egg product. His straw hat was pulled low on his forehead, and his lips, seeming thinner because of the beard beneath his chin, moved as he read the ingredients. His hands were broad, each knuckle distinct, but he held the carton between his fingertips with great care, as though it were actually an egg. You got the idea that this was like some strange, futuristic museum for him, that he'd been heading for the safety of the baking goods aisle but couldn't quite resist the allure of the computerized sign that flashed, "FROZEN DELECTIBLES— MEALS IN SECONDS!!!" The boy, in an identical straw hat, pressed his nose against one of the freezer doors. A small cloud of steam formed. The girl joined him, her face mostly hidden by the white bonnet she wore, her black shawl loose around her shoulders. Without looking down, the Amish guy placed a hand on the boy's shoulder and gently moved him back a step. The girl stepped back, too, and both huddled closer to him. The egg product went back on its shelf, the freezer door closed. They started to walk, the boy and girl on either side of him, and I wondered what would happen to them when the next group of racers rounded the bend. Would the Amish guy apologize if the man in the wheelchair tried to run him down? It was one thing to be polite at the country market, where everybody knows everybody anyway, but quite another thing in the brightness of the SUPER*FRESH, where nothing is black and white, where the lunchtime motto is "buy and fly," and the mammoth parking lot is a maze of cars and exhaust. I wondered where their horse and buggy was parked, if the horse was safe out there. I wondered what they were doing so far from home.

"Three more crackers and we're outta here," Stacey said. She was the one who decided these things. I was supposed to be keeping track of the crackers, too, watching and learning so that one day in the not-so-distant future when Stacey was District Supervisor, I'd be able to manage the "TRY SOME!" stand on my own. She seemed to read my thoughts. We both saw the Oriental couple at the same time. They were impeccably dressed except for their shoes, battered sneakers, and I imagined that they'd spent the first

part of their lunch hour jogging. "Okay, kid, it's time you did one on your own," she whispered, "Go for it."

I gulped, then waved to the Oriental couple headed in our direction. They waved back, looked confused. I came around the front of the stand and held up a cracker, made a big display of how simple it was to squirt the gunk onto it. "Would you like to try some?" I asked brightly.

"Not really," the Oriental woman said in perfect English. She had kind eyes. "We don't eat meat."

"Well," I said, "No big deal, because this New Improved Cheese and Pepperoni Spread doesn't exactly have meat in it."

"It doesn't?" She asked. She looked at the man beside her and he wrinkled his nose.

I pointed at the squirt bottle the way I'd seen Stacey do it. "No, see here? 'Flavored with aritificial beef and beef substitutes.' It's perfectly safe for vegetarians."

The Oriental woman cleared her throat and in a soft voice asked, "What is artificial beef?"

I laughed, couldn't help it. "I often wondered that myself," I said, "I mean, what does an artificial beef look like? If you lined one up in a field next to a real beef, would you be able to tell the difference?"

The Oriental couple chuckled, then nodded their goodbyes and sauntered away. I saw them headed past the canned, processed fish aisle toward the produce. "That isn't what you're supposed to say," Stacey said, then seemed to gather herself and put back on her manager's face. "Wouldn't it be more appetizing to the consumer if you informed him or her that soy proteins are an excellent source of nutrients, one of the most amazing products known to man?"

"I guess so," I said, and tried to seem eager to learn. "What am I supposed to say about the cheese by-products when they ask?"

"Don't you get it?" she asked, and began packing up the bottles of cheese spread. "It doesn't matter what you tell them so long as it makes them buy it." She stacked the miniature paper plates together, then the plastic knives. I don't know why we had plastic knives there, since there was nothing to cut. With the handy-dandy squirt bottles, there wasn't even anything to spread. I finished taking down the stand (a matter of minutes, since it was plastic), while she went to get a package of "munchies" for later. The "TRY SOME!" stand folded neatly into a square the size of an apple-crate. It even had a carrying handle on the top. While I waited for her to come back, I noticed that it'd started raining outside, thin streams of water down the plate glass, blurring the signs of the fast food places across the highway. The kid with the shaved head was in front of the old man in the wheelchair, in line. The Oriental couple got in the Speedy Express booth, each holding a see-through bag of grapes. Stacey came back, several foil packs of chips in the crook of her arm, and we headed for the Speedy Express.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the Amish guy and his kids headed for the same line, about equal distance from it as we were. Stacey hurried up so that we could beat him there, and the Amish guy seemed to slow down. Just as Stacey made the quick sidestep move that would irrevocably claim our place in line, the Amish guy's son rushed forward, his eyes wide as he scanned the bright rows of candy bars. He bumped into Stacey and the foil bags smacked against the floor. "Say 'excuse me,' Isaac," the Amish guy told the boy. Isaac sidled closer to the black pant leg of his father and said nothing. With a brisk shake of the head, Stacey deftly scooped up her bags, paused only long enough to make a waggling motion with her fingers that meant I should join her in line, then turned toward the cashier. The Amish guy took a step back and motioned me to go first.

It would've been easy for me, since I wasn't even buying anything, to get in front of him. For that matter, I could've strode right through the closed line beside us and met Stacey on the other side of the check-out. But the "TRY SOME!" stand seemed heavy all of a sudden, so I set it down and said, "No, you go ahead. I'm not in any hurry." Stacey glanced over her shoulder, blinking in a rapid, mechanical way at me, but then the cashier had blipped her purchases across the scanner and she had to get out her money. The Amish guy nodded at me and went first, the two kids practically clinging to him. He set down the five pound bag of sugar and the conveyor belt carried it to the scanner.

Stacey waited for me outside, in front of a big sign advertising Leaf Blowers for sale. Her foot tapped a steady beat on the wet sidewalk. She seemed about to say something, then changed her mind and said, "Let's go." Across the parking lot, I watched the Amish guy helping his daughter up into the cab of the buggy. The horse, in the rain, was jet black, as black as the blinkers and reins of his harness.

"I don't think I want to," I said.

"You don't think you want to what?" She narrowed her eyes at me.

"Go with you," I said, "To the hotel, then tomorrow to another store. I really don't."

"What do you mean?"

"Just that— and also, I don't think Leaf Blowers are practical. I mean, the wind blows the leaves around and then someone comes along with a Leaf Blower and blows them back, and then the wind'll just come up again. I mean, what's the point?"

In a steady monotone, each word distinct, she said, "Can you please tell me exactly what in the hell you're talking about?"

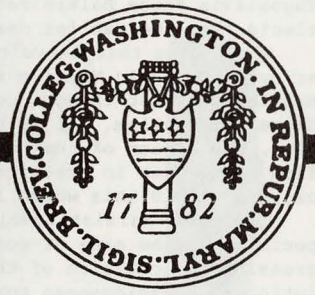
I set the stand down beside her. "I gotta go."

"Go where? What? Wait— what am I going to tell the District Supervisor?"

I didn't know what she was going to tell him, so I kept on walking. The rain was cold against my cheeks and neck, but at the same time it was soothing, each drop tickling the tension away. The horse and buggy was gone, but I knew that there'd be a payphone across the street and I thought I had enough money for a cab. Either that, or I could call home. It was lunchtime, and they'd be between milkings, sitting down to the first big meal of the day. I walked across the shifting rainbow lines of oil in the parking lot, and my heartbeat kind of steadied as I thought about how much simpler my world was going to be hereafter.

CRACK

1981



'80-'81

Sherman Lapel & Louis Winthorpe III

On True Revolution

by Brad Sinclair

Any formulation of an outline of a revolutionary theory must not begin with the question "Is revolution necessary?" but rather "What is the root of revolutionary consciousness?" Historically, many have been thought of as revolutionaries by their contemporaries: Mao, Lenin, Tito, Ortega and Castro all led leftist revolutions. Yet, what is the state of the states where these revolutions occurred? China has remained in a perpetual state of Oriental despotism. The Soviet Union and the various eastern block nations never evolved into genuinely socialist states. Yugoslavia faces Balkanization. Nicaragua is ruined economically. As for Cuba, any nation which elects and re-elects the same man for nearly thirty years cannot be considered to be a truly revolutionary society.

Where does this leave the revolutionary? To follow the teaching of such men invites the repetition of their errors. Dogmatic Marxism is truly dead as a viable revolutionary philosophy. Certain tendencies of traditional Marxist-Leninist thought contain the seeds of betrayal. The notion of a revolutionary vanguard carries with it the danger of elitism. It is this very phenomenon which was responsible for the betrayal of the Soviet revolution. Also, the notion of the historical inevitability of proletarian revolution has two major flaws, the most fundamental flaw being that in practice this belief tends to be rooted in faith. Faith is a poor foundation for political theory, and it is this which leads various socialists to sit on their thumbs, waiting for the inevitable revolution.

Rejecting Marxist revolutionary theory does not exclude the possibility of critically accepting other aspects, especially in the area of economics. Marx's critique of capitalism remains valid, as does Lenin's formulation of increasing exploitation of the Third World. The main emphasis must always remain on action and not dogma. True revolutionary consciousness emanates not from faith, or lust for power, but rather from the honest desire to improve the lot of the working class. Such a desire can only come from a proletarian orientation. The traditional notion of a revolutionary vanguard contains within it no small measure of arrogance: it is the utter height of arrogance to insist that a small group knows better the desires and needs of the proletariat itself. Such revolutionaries act in bad faith, and their revolutions are inevitably betrayed. Therefore, in true revolutionary practice, the act of revolution assumes primacy over any imposed or desired revolutionary agenda.

The following are the fundamental principles of true revolution:

*Morality is more necessary to the proper conduct of revolution than any single factor.

*Violence alienates, and should therefore be minimized.

*Attack economically.

*Anonymity is essential.

*The gentle enemy is to be more feared than the oppressive one.

*An imposed agenda must be avoided, however persuasion is essential.

*Action constitutes the most effective propaganda.

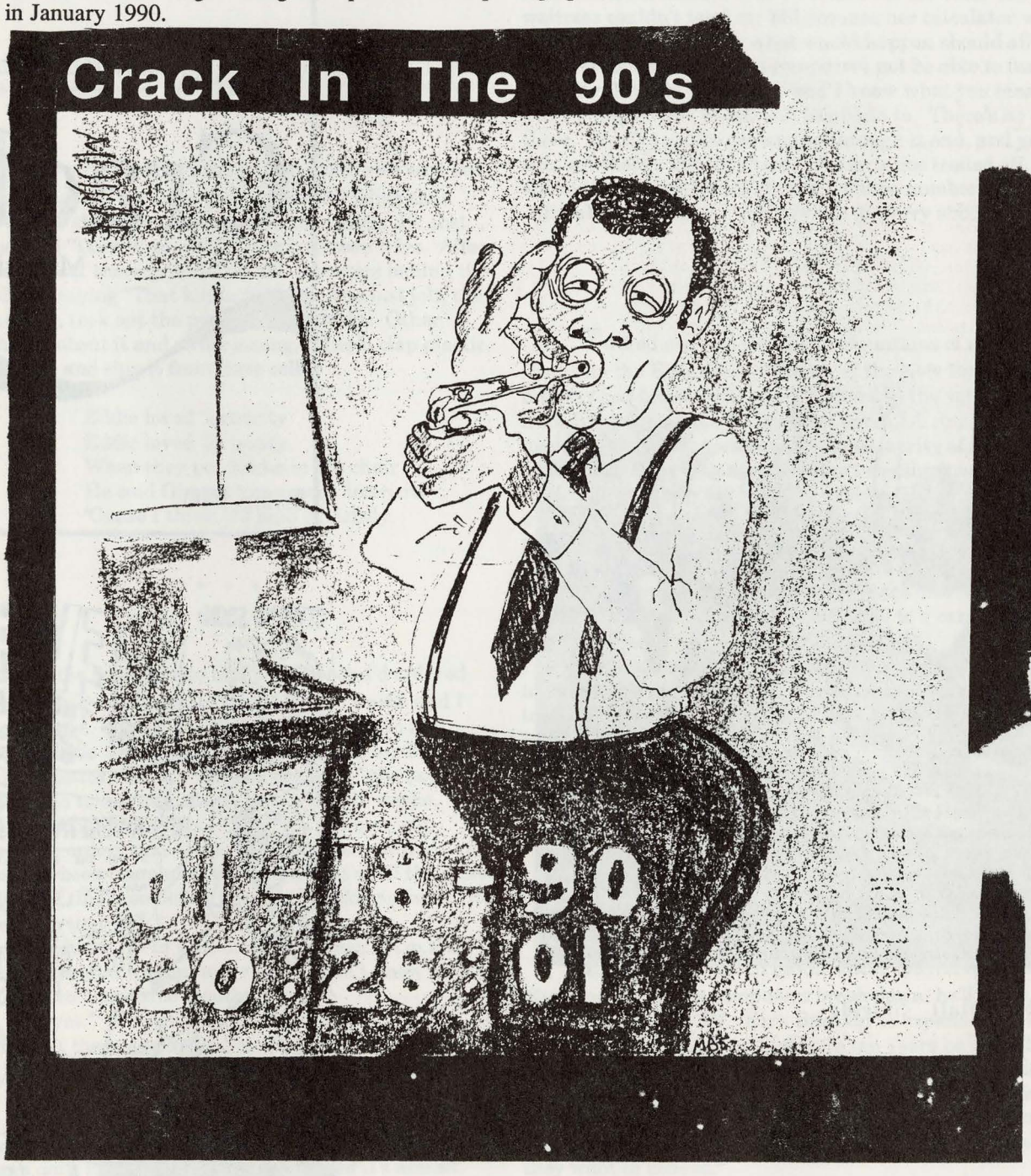
These are the fundamental principles by which the agendaless revolutionary, the true revolutionary, must act.

You could try to convince the average man of the necessity of revolution through vocal communication, you could talk until you are blue in the face, and you will get nowhere. However, if you talk about the greed of the rich, the exploitation of the worker, you will be rewarded with immediate agreement. The fundamental difference between the revolutionary and the average worker is that the revolutionary realizes that any exploitation is too much exploitation, whereas the average man agrees on the fundamental inequality of the current system, but will never act so long as the exploitation is not too excessive. With hyper-imperialism and the exportation of exploitation, the exploitation of the worker in western society is reduced, thereby mollifying him or her. The key to actualizing revolution, then, is to substantially worsen the lot of the western worker. Therefore the true revolutionary supports all policies which benefit the rich at the expense of the worker, thus accelerating the disparity between expectations and reality, and thereby ensuring revolution.

This is not the most essential tactic of the true revolutionary, however. As the nineteenth century tycoon Jay Gould noted, "I can hire half of the working class to kill the other half." This is still true today. The working class is divided; black against white, native against immigrant, north against south. The capitalist actively promotes such divisions, as they guarantee the perpetualization of his power. Therefore, the working class must be united, and historically there has been no more powerful unifying agent than misery. Therefore, the the true revolutionary attacks the means of production; unoccupied factories, transportation systems and centers of capital storage. These attacks must be so relentless in nature as to cause native holders of capital to invest elsewhere. This will increase unemployment to such a point that the masses will rise up.

To the would be revolutionary, a word of caution: beware the seductive nature of power. Beware those revolutionaries who would seek all power for themselves. The goal of a true revolutionary is not the dictatorship of the proletariat, but rather the utter extermination of the capitalist class and the establishment of a true multi-party democracy with an unalterable constitution which eliminates exploitation.

This page, an artist's rendition of DC Mayor Marion Barry's last night in office, replaces the original photo-copy collage of newspaper photos on the same event. On May 1, 1991, the US Federal Bureau of Investigations denied CRACK magazine rights to publish those photographs, first released in January 1990.



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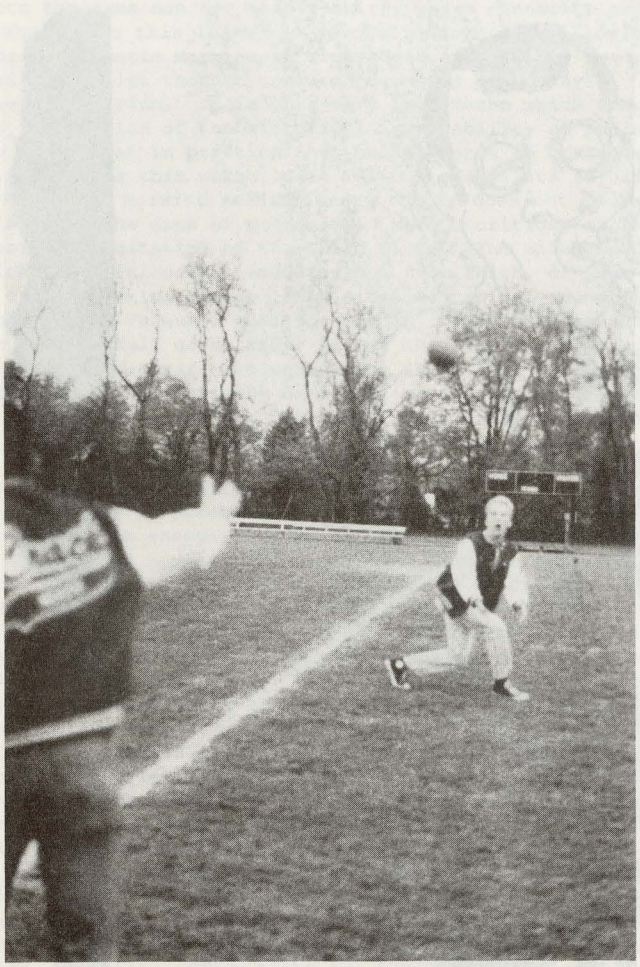

ElvisMatt Shields

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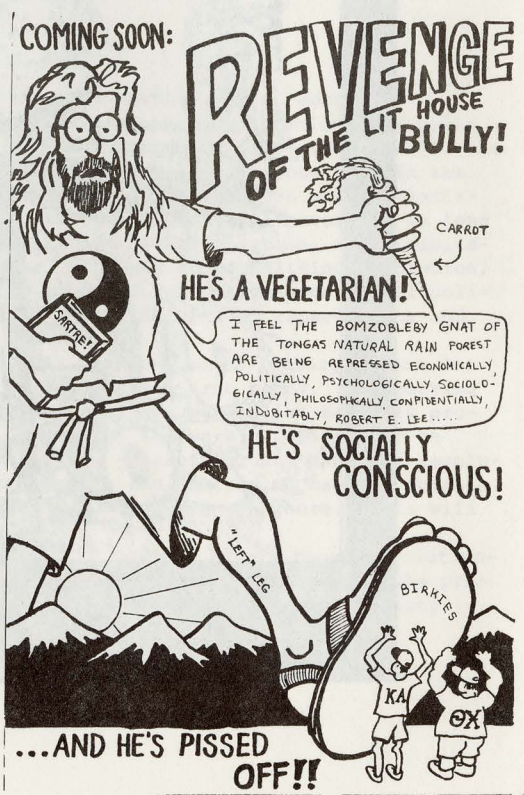
Spring 1990


COMING SOON:
REVENGE OF THE LIT HOUSE BULLY!
CARROT
HE'S A VEGETARIAN!
SARTRE!
I FEEL THE BOMZOBLEBY GNAT OF THE TONGAS NATURAL RAIN FOREST ARE BEING REPRESSED ECONOMICALLY, POLITICALLY, PSYCHOLOGICALLY, SOCIOLOGICALLY, PHILOSOPHICALLY, CONFIDENTIALLY, INDUBITABLY, ROBERT E. LEE.....
HE'S SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS!
"LEFT" LEG
BIRKIES
KA
ΘX
...AND HE'S PISSED OFF!!

ELECTRICITY

By Adam Brown

Did you ever hear about the guy on death row who everyday put his finger in the light bulb socket 'till when they finally put him in the chair and turned on the juice. He just grinned and said "Turn it up, doc." It took sixteen tries. After each one he just sat there grinning at the reporters behind the one way mirror, saying "That kinda tickles." The last jolt, the one that did him, took out the power in ten blocks. Other prisoners heard about it and wrote a song. They'd clap plastic cups on the floor and sing it from their cells.

Eddie loved 'lectricity
Eddie loved 'lectricity
When they put Eddie in the chair
He said Gimme some more 'lectricity
'Cause I think it's kind of tickely.

* * * * * * *

I went to the bookstore to check on a book I'd ordered months ago. They'd said it would take a couple weeks and I was getting anxious. The saleslady was a tall woman in a green corduroy dress with brown hair tied up in a big brown bun, thick red lipstick, oldish. "No, it's not here," she says. I tell her that I was told it would only take a couple weeks. "Did someone tell you that?" she says. "Well, it's not here yet. Sometimes these orders take time. The postage rate went up recently and the book companies will often wait until they have a lot of orders for this area before they ship books out here. It's cheaper for them that way."

"Why should I have to wait on them?" I say. "I'm the customer. They should wait on me, right? I don't know if I'll want it if I have to wait three months."

"Oh, yes, yes." She agrees completely.

"Well, isn't there a number I can call? Like for the company?" I didn't want to give her a hard time. She's just doing her job.

"Oh, yes, yes. I can give you a number and I know what you mean about wanting to call and talk to someone about this. Everything is done by computers these days and it's almost impossible just to get a human voice. . ."

She wouldn't look me in the eye. She kept looking over my shoulder and when she tried to look at me her eyelids would flutter shut involuntarily. It was disconcerting.

"Everyone depends on these computers to do everything. As a matter of fact I was in a restaurant the other day and the waitress couldn't total my bill because her calculator was broken. I shudder to think what would happen should all the power go out and all these computers not be able to function. Actually, I would welcome it and I know what you mean about there being no one to call and complain to. There's no one out there. It's like you're swimming through it and, and you call out, but there's nobody there. . ." Her voice trailed off. She started searching frantically for a phone number I could call. After about a minute I told her not to worry about it and left.

* * * * * * *

Tucked away in the Unita Mountains of northeastern Utah sits the Electrifying Church of the New Light. It's a plain brown wood house with a tiny orchard in the yard. Reverend Ezra Barnaby stands on the front porch. A stout old man, Ezra moves quickly and speaks with the authority of someone who found his calling long ago: "We don't worship idols, tempt poisonous snakes or build huge temples in God's name. We just try to practice his will. If our ways trouble outsiders, then let them remain outsiders."

Horace Wilburn kneels in the grass. His wife and daughters watch as Rev. Barnaby crosses him with a pair of jumper cables. The cables are attached to a car battery at Barnaby's feet.

"Are you ready to let Jesus into your life? Are you ready to feel His power coursing through your veins?" Barnaby touches the cables together and orange sparks snap up at his face. "Horace Wilburn, put your hands out and give yourself over to God."

Later, Horace says to his wife "I closed my eyes and felt the holy ghost enter my body. I swear I felt Him in me. Marilyn, I want to have the kids baptized as soon as possible."

* * * * * * *

Electricity flows in power lines. Maybe Eddie does too. Maybe when all the computers break down, he'll show up on my TV screen. Ed TV. Ezra Barnaby is expanding his Electrifying Church of the New Light. In ten years he says there'll be one in every city. The car battery will be kept in an altar, wrapped in cloth. There'll be crosses painted on the sides. I had a dream once where Dan Quayle turned into a wise old black man and whispered to me, "People tend to believe what they want to believe."

Diet CRACK
- a play for people with short attention spans

by Morgan Huff

* * * * *

Body by BENSON (Rod)

Belly Art by Dan Kretzer

Dedication: "Margeret Capelletti has a Big ol' Glottis," said Uncle Chuck
- a chopped beef dangler on his lips.

~ **Spring Time Melon Party: Guttural Somethin' or Other.** (a play in 14 acts).

Cast-of-Characters
-Spiniker (a model for the makers of Nordic Track)
-Gina (an aspiring broadway dancer/housekeeper)
-Brandelois (Egg inspector. Satanist)
-Caleb the Bologna Gobblin' Chimpanzee (Pan troglodyta)

ACT 1 (Curtain rises on Brandelois standing alone in a candy isle of a 7-11 in Detroit.)

Brandelois: What?

ACT 2 (Curtain rises on Caleb running amok in the Female lavaratory of Pampers Inc. Ny, Ny)

Caleb: (Caleb yelps one undecipherable syllable)

ACT 3 (Curtain rises. We find Spiniker flipping through a recent copy of National Geographic. Waiting room: Dr. Quat, DDS)

Spiniker: He. . .

ACT 4 (Curtain rises. Spiniker stands in the kitchenette section of a Sears showroom, Clusterfuck, USA. He's undressed, making waffles.)

Spiniker: . . . wants. . .

ACT 5 (Curtain rises to find Brandelois knee-deep in the soil of a potted plant.)

Brandelois: PEZ?

ACT 6 (Curtain rises. Spinikier is crouched on one knee. A dull moan is heard offstage. Pieces of Medeival armor are dropped from above.)

Spiniker: . . . what!?

ACT 7 (Curtain rises on Gina, clad in gorilla suit. Bound back against a table. Legs raised into gynocologist stirrups.)

Gina: His. . .

ACT 8 (Curtain rises on Gina, licking an anchor.)

Gina: . . . o . . .

ACT 9 (Curtain rises. Gina stands in a shower, checking breasts for bumps. Radio plays: "The Rose".)

Gina: . . . ver. . .

ACT 10 (Curtain rises. Brandelois awakens. Chicken coup: Ho-Ho-Kus, N.J.)

Brandelois: Tub.

ACT 11 (Curtain rises to find Gina in Antoinette-esque formal dress beside guillotine)

Gina: . . . alls.

ACT 12 (Curtain rises on Caleb chest-deep in Caro syrup.)

Caleb: Coo.

ACT 13 (Curtain rises. Spiniker bows down to a feces pattie on some annonymous boat dock.)

Spiniker: Quin. . .

ACT 14 (Curtain rises. Stage is clear except for a black eyelash palced toward back. Spiniker is seen duck taping a beef tongue to his forearm.)

Spiniker: . . . cy?

_____

the

_____

end

Fargo the Golfing Cowboy

By Dan Kretzer

Everybody at the Cutlass Country Club wore pink and white, and not a goddamn one of them could play golf. I was a caddy at Cutlass last year and it was like getting paid to watch the Three Stooges. One old man hit a ball into the same water hazard fifteen times before his club slipped out of his hands and flew into a tree. He just stood there in his pink trousers and white shirt and waited for me to climb up after it. It cracked me up the way all those hackers would hit the ball everywhere but in the hole, cheat on their score cards and then go lie about how well they played in the club bar.

There was one real golfer at the club. He was a five foot tall guy from Japan named Yoto. Unlike the rest of the members, Yoto always wore all black. He also didn't like Americans. When I caddied for him he told me I was a good example of an American, slow and clumsy. Then he stiffed me at the end of the day.

I only caddied for him once, and that was enough. His bag had forty clubs in it! It weighed a goddamn ton. I was sure I would never stand up straight again after carrying that bag around for four hours. He had all the woods and all the irons. There were four putters; one for uphill putts, one for downhill putts, one for wet grass, and one for dry grass. He had specialized clubs for every occasion. One club was designed for shots out of sand traps when the sand was wet and gravely on a sunny day. It got to be a little silly.

Yoto used every club, too. I never saw anybody take a game so seriously. He'd kneel and meditate before every shot, and then he'd line it up for twenty minutes. After that he'd get just the right club, say a prayer to his ancestors and finally swing at the ball.

But for all of his ridiculous little rituals and special clubs, Yoto could play golf. He'd play every morning and bet a large amount of money with whichever pink and white club member wanted to play him. Every other member wanted to see Yoto get beat, and beat badly. But it didn't look like it would ever happen. Yoto would always win. Nobody at Cutlass could play on his level. That is until Fargo Cultrain joined the club.

It was a blistering hot day when Fargo mosied through the door of the pro shop where me and Clive, the club's golf pro, were sitting around. Fargo wore a big white cowboy hat and a blue flannel shirt. His jeans were tucked into his big, dusty cowboy boots which had spurs that clinked when he walked. Fargo was almost seven feet tall, and he was big.

"You're a long way from Texas, aren't you cowboy?" Clive joked, following it up with his wimpy, irritating little laugh. Fargo stared at him through reflective sunglasses and didn't say a word. "I was just kidding," Clive said after a minute of silence. "Are you a new groundskeeper?"

Fargo pulled off his sunglasses and gave Clive the most psychotic look I've ever seen. "Son," he said, "I'm a member here! My name's Fargo Cultrain and this is my first day out. I got my bag outside and I just came lookin' for a caddy. Now am I gonna hafta bust that cash register over your head, or are you gonna get on the horn and fetch me one?"

Clive had a completely-scared-shitless look on his face. He rifled through his list of members and saw Fargo's name at the very bottom, written in pen that morning. "Mr. Cultrain, I'm very, very sorry." He looked at me. "Reggie, why don't you show Mr. Cultrain to the first hole."

Fargo changed from his boots into golf spikes, which also had spurs that clinked on them. I walked over to the bag rack. Finding Fargo's bag wasn't much of a problem. It was big, and made from cow skin, standing out in the mass of polished leather bags. I picked it up and almost fell over from my own momentum. The bag was practically empty. I looked inside and all he had was a nine iron and a putter.

"Um, sir...?" I said.

"Fargo."

"Fargo, there are some pretty long holes on this course. Are you sure this nine iron's gonna be enough?"

"Son, I can hit that nine iron ten yards if I have to and I can hit it three hundred yards if I have to. Ain't got need for other irons or woods."

I called bullshit on that. "You can hit a ball three hundred yards with a nine iron? A gorilla couldn't hit a nine that far." It was true as far as I knew. Nine irons are designed to lob the ball high and no farther than a hundred and fifty yards. Fargo was big alright, but I couldn't see anyone hitting a ball that far with a nine.

"Well, son, why don't you lug that bag over to the tee and we'll just see about that." He mosied over to the tee and teed up a new white ball. "Nine iron please."

I smiled and handed him the nine iron. I figured he was probably some sort of screwball, but at least he wasn't wearing pink and white. Fargo planted his feet and put the club next to the ball, resting on the grass. Leaning the club against his crotch he spit into both hands and rubbed them together. A pink and white crowd had gathered to catch a glimpse of the newest member at Cutlass. They were all muttering to each other. I heard one old man ask his friend if the cowboy was really driving the first hole with a nine iron. The first hole was four hundred yards long with two long sand traps in the fairway about three hundred yards out. Most people drove with a one wood on that hole because that club hits the farthest.

Fargo drew the club back from the ball and over his head. He gritted his teeth. "REMEMBER THE ALAMO!" he cried as he swung his nine iron. There was a deep, sweet sounding crack as the club swung through and belted the tiny white ball high into the sky. I followed it with my eyes, part of a caddy's job. The ball floated high and dwindled to just a speck. And then it dropped onto the middle of the fairway, right between the two sand traps. I swear to God he hit that ball three hundred yards!

"That about three hundred yards?" he asked me.

"Uh-huh," I nodded.

I stood gaping at the ball as Fargo mosied over and held out his nine iron. I put it in the bag and followed him down the fairway. Behind us I could hear the members chattering to each other. I figured they would all be pretty appalled by the way Fargo had shouted when he swung the club. We got to the ball and Fargo took the nine iron again. "REMEMBER THE ALAMO!" he cried. The ball landed on the green.

"Fargo?"

"Yeah?"

"Do you shout 'Remember the Alamo' every time you swing your club?"

"Sure do. Why?"

"Well, I don't think the other members are gonna like it. They're a little stuffy around here about things like that."

He snorted and stepped onto the green. I handed him the putter. Fargo looked at the slope of the green for a second and shouted again. "REMEMBER THE ALAMO!" The ball rolled fifteen feet into the cup. "That's a birdie, son. Three strokes on a par four." I wrote it down on his card. Fargo wasn't the ordinary Cutlass Country Club golfer. He didn't wear pink and white, he made a scene with his shouting, and he could play golf.

He shot par on the next two holes. "You know, sir..."

"Fargo."

"You know, Fargo, you're the first guy I've caddied for this summer who's any good at golf. Except for Mr. Yoto. He's the Japanese fella who scores in the mid sixties."

"That ain't bad," Fargo said, approaching his ball on the fourth green.

"No, but he takes forever. He meditates and prays and takes twenty minutes with every shot."

"Works for him, don't it?"

"Sure."

"Japanese folks are like that. They nitpick and get all pissy about everything, but I'll be damned if they don't get results. You may not like it, but you gotta respect it unless you can do better."

"I guess so. But he bets with the other members and kills them on the course. You figure he'd take it easy on them. I mean nobody else at this course can play decently."

"They shouldn't bet with him. REMEMBER THE ALAMO!"

"Nice putt."

"Weren't nothin'"

"Maybe you could play Yoto. I'm sure you

could win."

"What makes you think I got the money to bet?"

"You're a member here."

Fargo smiled. "Son, you don't like this Yoto fella, do ya? And you're itchin' to see him lose, ain't ya?"

"It'd be a refreshing change of pace."

One of the pink and white golfers on the fairway next to us marched over to where Fargo and I were talking. He was red in the face, huffing and puffing. Fargo tipped his hat and said howdy.

"Howdy nothing, mister!" said the other golfer. I recognized him as Mr. Farnsworth. He was one of the less shitty golfers at the club, but he was a lousy tipper. "My wife and I are trying to play golf and we can't concentrate with you're screaming like that!"

"Well, I'm afraid there ain't much I can do about it stranger," Fargo said, wiping the sweat from his brow with his sleeve. "My great great grand-daddy killed off three hundred Mexicans at the Alamo with his nine iron. I just couldn't bring myself to swing a club without honorin' his ghost in a proper fashion."

Mr. Farnsworth stood there staring at Fargo like he was some sort of lunatic; he might have been on to something.

"Sir, I am reporting you. What's your name?"

"Name's Fargo Cultrain."

"Alright then, Reggie, will you see to it that my complaint reaches Clive?" "Yes, sir," I said, not meaning it.

Mr. Farnsworth returned to his game. Fargo spat.

"Y'know son, sometimes I wonder how you yankees ever won the goddamn Civil War. Are you really gonna rat me out?" "Of course not."

"You're alright, son." On the next hole Fargo let out a particularly loud "REMEMBER THE ALAMO!" and hit the ball three hundred and thirty yards with his nine iron.

The next morning, Clive was waiting for me in the club house. "Reggie, I've been waiting for you. How did Roy Rogers do yesterday."

"A sixty-five," I said. I knew that would piss Clive off since he was supposed to be the club's pro and he hadn't ever broke seventy on the course.

"Sixty-five? With a nine iron and a putter?"

"That's what I said. He can hit that nine pretty far."

Clive frowned. "Yeah, well he won't be doing it on this course much longer. The members are getting together. There were over a dozen complaints yesterday about his shouting nonsense. None of the members can concentrate on their game with his howling. They're going to vote on it this week and see if they can get him kicked out."

I didn't bother to say anything. I thought it would be a pretty shitty thing to kick out a guy who played so well. Fargo might have been the only hope the membership would ever have of seeing Yoto lose a round of golf. Clive started talking to the other caddies about Fargo but he had to shut up abruptly when the big cowboy mosied in.

Clive looked right at me. "Reggie," he said. "Why don't you go out with Mr. Cultrain again?" Hell, I was happy to do it. Fargo had given me a fifty dollar tip for carrying two clubs for him.

By the time Fargo and I were at the fifteenth tee I decided to let Fargo know what the other members were up to.

"You know, Fargo?"

"Yeah."

"The other folks in the club are trying to get you kicked out of here. Supposedly they don't like your shouting." I found myself talking with a slight Texas accent. Accents always seem to rub off on people.

"That so?"

"That's what Clive tells me."

"REMEMBER THE ALAMO!"

"Nice shot."

"Much obliged."

"So what are you gonna do about these people?"

"What can I do? If they all vote me out then I guess I'll just have to git."

We got to the next tee. Yoto was just ahead of us, about two hundred yards out in the fairway. He was on his knees testing the ground to see how soft it was. Fargo teed up and waited for Yoto to get out of range. And Fargo waited and waited and waited.

"That Yoto?" Fargo asked me.

"Sure is. He's probably trying to decide if he should use his wet grass downhill lie seven iron, or his sunny day soft ground six iron."

Fargo squinted. "Sure does look like the little cuss has a lot of clubs in that bag, don't it?"

"About forty. Officially you're not supposed to have more than fourteen though; so technically he's cheating."

"Japanese folks don't play by our rules, son. Fortunately I don't play by theirs."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I'm sick of waiting for the little varmint to take his swing." He stepped to the ball. "REMEMBER THE ALAMO!" The ball shot high into the air and fell to the ground a few yards from where Yoto stood. I busted out laughing. Yoto hit the turf and covered his head. His caddy looked back at us and smiled. Fargo handed me the club and marched down the fairway.

Yoto was one pissed son of a bitch. He was jumping up and down and striking karate poses as Fargo walked past him.

"You there!" he hissed.

Fargo turned and looked at him. "Howdy," he chuckled.

"What did you think you were doing? I could have been killed!" Yoto's face was scarlet.

"Ain't never heard of anyone bein' killed by a golf ball. Besides, I'm just playin' through."

"You're a typical arrogant American!"

"Hey, calm down. You gotta watch your blood pressure there, son." Everybody was 'son' to Fargo, even the girl who worked at the snack bar on the tenth hole.

Yoto took a few deep breaths. "I will put you in your place, mister cowboy," he said after regaining some composure.

Fargo prepared to his his ball. "That a challenge, son?"

"Tomorrow, at ten o'clock. We'll play eighteen holes for money. How does ten thousand dollars sound?" I looked at Yoto's caddy, a younger kid named Howard. We both whistled. Yoto usually kept his bets in the four figure range.

"Better make it twenty," Fargo told him. "I'm thinkin' about gettin' a pool in my back yard."

"You're on!"

"REMEMBER THE ALAMO!" Fargo blasted his shot to the green and that was the last we saw of old Yoto for the day. I didn't bring up the other members trying to get him kicked out again, although several people did ask him to stop yelling.

The next day, everyone was talking about the contest. Clive was rooting for Yoto. Most of the members had mixed feelings. They all hated Fargo because he was different, but they all seemed in awe by the thought of Yoto losing. There was no word on whether Fargo would be kicked out of the club.

Fargo showed up at nine o'clock and went to the driving range. I slipped out of the pro shop and joined him. He had his nine iron and was firing away at the woods out past the two hundred and fifty yard marker. Each shot was preceded by a "REMEMBER THE ALAMO!"

"Ready for the big game?" I asked.

"You gonna caddy for me?"

"Of course. You realize that this round's gonna be a lot slower than the usual with Yoto praying and meditating all the time."

"I can deal with that. Say, do you play golf?"

I was a little startled that he asked this. "A little bit. Why do you want to know?"

"Well, you're always tellin' me how bad everyone here is, right? I was just wonderin' if you spoke from a position of authority. Here, let me see you swing."

Fargo handed me his nine iron. I lined the ball up, lifted the club and swung. The ball went high and straight, landing about one hundred and thirty yards out. It was a pretty good shot. I looked proudly to Fargo, but he wasn't impressed.

"Try yellin' when you swing," Fargo suggested.

"What should I yell? 'Remember the Alamo'?"

He nodded. "Okay," I said. I lined up another ball and pulled the club back over my head. "Remember the Alamo!" I hit this ball cleaner and a little higher. One hundred and fifty yards.

"You're gettin' there. Shout louder."

"REMEMBER THE ALAMO!" The ball went one hundred and seventy yards. Fargo told me to yell louder. "REMEMBER THE ALAMO!!!" The ball went past the two hundred yard marker. "Holy shit," I whispered.

"Didn't think you could hit a nine iron that far, huh?" I just laughed and shook my head. It was like I'd just walked on water or something. Fargo looked at his watch. "Time to go beat Yoto," he said.

Yoto was waiting at the first tee. There was a pink and white throng of onlookers. Fargo mosied up to Yoto. He was nearly two feet taller and twice as broad as his opponent. Yoto held out two fists. Fargo pointed at the left; Yoto opened them both, revealing a small wooden tee in his right hand. Yoto would shoot first.

Yoto drove with his Distancemaster 500-LX stainless steel one wood. It was designed in a Japanese lab to hit a golf ball farther than any other club in the world. Fargo's drive with a nine iron went ten yards past Yoto's ball. Fargo won the first hole by a stroke.

The next few holes were ties. The pink and white crowd watched Fargo and Yoto without so much as a peep. They weren't rooting for either one, but it seemed like their lives depended on the outcome. Each time, Fargo would step right up and blast the ball after a few seconds thought. Yoto carefully plotted each shot, placing each within a few inches of where he wanted it. Fargo would sit against a tree and take a siesta whenever Yoto was planning his next move. On the sixth hole, Yoto's patience paid off. Fargo went into a water hazard and lost the hole by three strokes. Yoto led by two.

I noticed Fargo was sweating in his jeans and heavy flannel shirt. He undid his top two buttons. I asked him if he was okay. He told me he hoped so.

Fargo played a patient game of catch up. On

the tenth hole he took a gamble, cutting a corner over some low trees. It worked, the ball hit the green and rolled into the cup. Yoto's lead was cut to one. Then on the sixteenth hole, a par three, Fargo nailed his drive. A hole in one. Yoto sunk his second shot and they were tied.

The seventeenth hole was a tie and it all came down to the final hole. The eighteenth hole was a long par five, almost six hundred yards long. Fargo teed up and cracked his nine iron. The ball faded to the right, near a clump of trees. Yoto's drive went straight.

Fargo's second shot went a good three hundred and fifty yards, landing just short of the green. There was a sand trap between his ball and the hole. Yoto's second shot landed in the fairway with nothing but open grass between him and the little red flag that marked the cup.

"Next shot could be trouble, son," Fargo said as we approached the green. I could tell he was getting nervous. His voice no longer had the steady drone it usually did. Now he sounded shaky. I patted him on the back.

"I've seen you make harder," I said.

The pink and white crowd huddled around the green. Yoto knelt by his ball and prayed. He rose and lined up his club. Then he did a weird thing. He lifted one leg and spun around on the other. With his eyes shut, Yoto swung the club with one arm. Fargo and I watched dumbfounded as the ball popped up and landed only two inches from the hole! My heart sank. Yoto began laughing. He danced up to the green and tapped his ball into the cup for a birdie. He looked at Fargo.

"That is a special shot I developed in Tokyo. It combines golf with karate. I call it Yitsushiuto. I'm afraid your chances are slim my friend." He laughed again and stepped off to the side so Fargo could take his shot.

I stepped back as Fargo go ready to hit. Somewhere out in the distance I heard a dog barking, everything else was dead silent. Fargo pulled his nine iron back. He looked up at me, cracked a grin and winked. "REMEMBER PEARL HARBOR!!!" He yelled it so loud my ears rang. He swung a chip shot and lobbed the ball over the sand trap. It landed with a thump on the green and rolled into the cup. A double birdie; Fargo won.

He looked at Yoto. "I developed that shot in Dallas! It combines brains and balls. I call it the Texas Titty Twister!" Fargo fell down he was laughing so hard, and I laughed with him. Yoto busted one of his specialized clubs over his knee. The pink and white crowd dispersed, satisfied, but silent.

Fargo tipped me five hundred dollars for caddying. The two of us had lunch in the club house. It was the last game Fargo played at Cutlass. They didn't like his style. He shouted when he swung, and he didn't wear pink and white. Clive informed him after lunch that the membership had voted him out of the club. He spat on the ground. "Adios, amigo," he said to me, and with his bag over his shoulder, mosied off into the parking lot.

Yoto kept playing at Cutlass. He kept playing until he won enough to buy the club. After he bought it, he destroyed it and put up a VCR factory that only employs Japanese workers. Sometimes when I drink a little too much I'll go down to the factory and hit some golf balls through the windows, shouting every time I swing the nine iron.

"REMEMBER PEARL HARBOR!"

Fiction by Adam Brown

1. Annie's Grandma

I roll down the window of Annie's Honda as we go over the bridge and look down at the water, all black with neon from the bordering restaurants and bars spilled over it. At night the river is black and in the daytime it's brown. I fell in the river once, when I was drunk and 14 with my friend Damian. Made me smell like a sewer. Then we're off the bridge and on the blue streets and Annie is talking to me. She's saying this guy came to our school to speak. He spent seven years hitchhiking around the United States, didn't have to spend any money because people would put him up and give him food, and he'd do work for them and stuff. He lived with the homeless in LA and the Rockerfellers in New York. The reason it worked is because he was from Greenland.

I tell Annie about a hitchhiker who used to carry a big duffle bag and when he got a ride he'd cut off the driver's legs and put them in a bag. Police caught him driving a stolen Hyundai with 14 legs in the trunk.

That's really sick and then Annie lights another white Marlboro, says I saw my grandma last night. Annie's grandma is solid, solid as Annie's hereditary predilection toward cigarettes and cancer. The grandma is older than a hundred years and Annie at 18 fears her grandma will outlive her. The grandma stayed at their house for a week once and whenever I called she would answer and hiss You Shouldn't Call Here While I'm Napping into the phone before hanging up. I saw the grandma once when we were watching TV in the basement and she came out of her room to go upstairs. We watched, frozen to the couch in the dark, as she ascended the steps, hand sliding up the wooden railing, each fuzzy blue slipper step as slow and deliberate as lung cancer with red eyes.

What was she doing, I ask.

She'd walked to my house. My mom was supposed to drop some medicine off for her, but she forgot so my grandma walked all the way to my house and that's 4 miles Alec, the woman's 103 years old. I was taking a nap and got woken up by this banging on my window. When I looked up, there she was with her face scowling and pressed against the glass. I almost had a heart attack. God, she's evil. I hate her.

The conversation is easy. If I don't feel like saying anything, Annie will talk. I can always listen to Annie talk.

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2. Billy's Story

The same way I'm listening to Bill. Bill's a big guy, old, with a soft voice. Sometimes when he's explaining somethin' or just talking with you he'll end the sentence with a "can you dig it?", which is cool in a fifties sort of way. I'm sitting on the edge of the driveway and he's in the grass. We just finished insulating the attic and it's break time. I've got insulation all over me, stuck on my arms, in my hair. Sweat's like glue with insulation. Bill's drinking a cherry soda. I have grape.

"Now there was this friend of mine, Ernie, who knew this other guy named Bob, you see. Now Bob was married to Lucy and she was pretty, soft hair, big brown eyes. Nice body too, y'know. Ernie and the guys used to go over Bob's house on Saturdays, drink beer and watch the games all day. Most women wouldn't have any part of that you know, they'd be steaming that their husband is sitting around drinking beer with his friends on a Saturday afternoon when he should be doing something like working in the garage, or fixing the roof, you know, takin' care of business. Lucy wasn't like that though. She'd be bringing in chips or throwing out the empty beer dig? And that was cool, so Ernie and everybody, they really liked Lucy, they'd say "You got a good woman there, Bob" or "I wish my wife was like that," y' know. Not many women as good as that Lucy, but she was sick. She had a heart condition and they both knew it was nothing but a matter of time. And one day it happened, Lucy died. And so Bob was very down, wouldn't talk to no one about it. . . but here's what he did, see. He got special permission so he could keep her body at home and got the undertaker to build him a glass casket, air tight, and then he took her home with him. He took her home and put her right in the living room, right where the coffee-table used to be, between the couch and television. It cost him everything too, that glass casket, he had to use all his savings, sell the car and even that wouldn't of covered it, if it weren't for insurance. He spent all his money, but it was alright because he was happy, y'dig? And Ernie and the other guys, they started comin' around again for the games, but it was weird, you know. There was the living room with Lucy laying there right in the middle all sealed up in this glass box, like she was asleep, or something. Bob had her dressed real casual, blue jeans, blouse, tennis shoes. At first everybody was like "Bob's gone crazy", but they got used to it. Bob would say "I'd rather have her at home with me than 6 feet under" and then lay the chips out right on top of her, put his feet up and watch the games. So they all got used to it, 'till one day Ernie was there, it'd been a few weeks now, and they were all watching the game when Ernie reaches for some chips and notices that

Lucy's hands are at kind of a different angle than they should be. He doesn't say nothin' about it, you know, he just figures it's his imagination or somethin'. But then, the next week, he sees that one of her shoes isn't tied right and, he knows something's up with that and after they leave he mentions it to the other guys. So the next Saturday, everyone's checking her out, y'dig, they all want to see if there's something wrong this time. And her shirt's all untucked, so everybody knows, y'see, what Bob's been doing. They're all sitting there, starin' at Lucy instead of watching the game and Bob, he notices this. He starts turning all red, says "What're you all lookin' at?" real loud, like he should be offended that they're staring at his dead wife when he's got her in the damn living room. Nobody says anything, you know they all just sit still and he starts yelling, like "Stop looking at her!" so everybody leaves. Ernie, he walks out last, and Bob says to him "Why you all leaving? Sit down, watch the game." But Ernie says "Naw, I gotta be goin' home. My wife, she'll get mad if I'm not home" and walks out."

Bill stops talking and lights a cigarette. I'm sitting there, blinking at the sidewalk and sipping grape Nehi for awhile before I ask him what happened to Bob. Bill takes a drag and looks at me.

"Well, the other guys at work, they got wind of it and pretty soon none of them would talk to Bob either. His ride stopped comin' around in the morning and he had to take the bus. Bob, he's goin' around acting like he doesn't know why nobody won't talk to him. "What'd I do? What'd I do?" But everytime he tries to ask somebody, they just walk away, turn around and walk away. Finally he corners Ernie in the parking lot and he won't let him get into his car 'till he tells him. So Ernie says "Look man, we know what you've been doing to Lucy. We know why you wanted to keep her home with you." Bob, he doesn't turn red this time. He turns white. Ernie says he turned white like a skeleton, then kind of shuffled away.

After that everybody pretty much lost touch with Bob. Sold his house, moved across town. We heard he got a job with the Post Office."

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3. Birds

One morning there were birds all over my house. They woke me up and when I looked out the window I saw hundreds of them, filling the trees and carpeting the lawn. Black birds, too small to be crows. I went in the bathroom to shave and there were birds outside that window too, perched on the telephone line, four of them sitting on the window sill. the sound was constant, rising and ebbing all at once. So I went outside. It seemed like the thing to do.

The birds covered the lawn and trees and some telephone lines across the street. I thought they might fly away when I came out, but they didn't. There were so many birds it was hard to see the grass and I didn't know why they were there. So I walked out to the center of the yard, the birds fluttering away from my feet then filling up the space behind like an oasis, and looked at my house with black birds milling neck to neck on the roof, nestled in the TV antenna, all making noise together. I imagined all the birds attacking me.

A car stopped on the street and an old man came out. He ascended the steps from the sidewalk, head slowly nodding up and around while stepping through the grass 'till he reached the center of my yard. He had a green checkered sport-coat and white snowy goatee, liver spotted face. We stood there for awhile, watching the birds.

I've studied birds for a good deal of my life, he said, and only seen something like this once. It was 1938, I was twenty years old and living on a farm. One day the birds did this. I'd been out working in the fields when my little sister came running out to me. Joseph, she said, come back to the house quick. I asked her why, was something the matter, but she was smiling and said no, but you've got to come back to the house. We ran all the way back, and when we got there, there were crows all over the house, cawwing just like these birds.

I asked if he knew why, and he said no, he didn't. We stood there, not saying anything and then he said he had to be going, got in his car and drove off. I went inside. After awhile, the birds flew away.

Incomplete Bridges

By Chris Rummell

As he stood on the bridge, a piece of newspaper landed at his feet and fell into the river below him. The railing was cold, he thought, placing his hands so that he could lift himself over. His feet got stuck and, for a moment, he couldn't jump.

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"I shut the door behind me," I said walking out onto the porch, sitting down in my chair. She just looked at me.

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I never knew him. I was only a few months old when he died. I tried asking mom about him but she'd never answer. She always told me she didn't want to talk about it. I always knew what had happened, I just wanted to hear it from her so that I could go on with my life, let go. She didn't want to let go, she couldn't let go, so we never talked about it.

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A car drove down the hills in the distance. You could see the headlights moving down into the west side of town and onto the bridge. Eventually, a man got out and looked around for a second, moving over to the other man standing, looking off the side of the bridge.

"Catch me if I fall, O.K.? Catch me if I fall?"

No answer.

"I need this, you know. I need this."

No answer.

The man started to walk away, back to his car.

"I need this, damnit."

Not looking back at his brother "Yeah, well so do I, but you don't see me jumping off the side of a goddamn bridge, do you? DO YOU? What the hell are you doing to yourself?"

"Catch me if I fall, O.K.?"

But he didn't catch him.

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She looked at me, wanting to see what was going on inside, but I never open up to anyone, not even her.

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I used to think about him a lot when I was younger. I always saw a road somewhere out in the desert that lasted forever. I knew he was in the darkness somewhere in front of me only I couldn't see him. I followed the dotted yellow lines to keep moving so I could catch up with him. In the distance, I could see the same hills, but I never got any closer to them. I kept walking, thinking that I would find him, but I never got past those hills, those same hills in the distance. I never found him.

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His brother had already left, when he jumped, falling through the mist and into the. . .

i forgot to close the door behind me when i left nothing let me feel nothing past the wooden door nothing splinters in my wrists nothing splashing down my cheeks the water burns stop the flow can't stop nothing past her love i forgot past nothing kill me do it yourself i will i can't i did i for got to clo se the g o d da m n ed o o r

. . .river.

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When my uncle died, he stated in his will that he wanted to be cremated and thrown into the same river that my father killed himself in. He wanted to be thrown from the bridge when it was snowing. He said he needed it. It didn't snow for over three years.

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"What are you thinking about?" she asked.

"Nothing."

We sat together, watching the fields, but I was looking past the fields, into the desert, looking for my father somewhere on that road. But I never got past those hills.

And The Shot Went In

By Pat Attenasio

-You don't have to say a word, Gram says, I know exactly what you are thinking.

She glides from the sink to the open window, waving her hands in the breeze. A man on the street below sees this and signals her with a tip of his hat.

-Remind me to buy some paper towels, she says while rolling her damp fingers in the blowing folds of fabric that frames the kitchen's only window. All these worthless men around here think I am chasing them.

Her head crows out the window and looks toward the corner to see if my father's car has arrived yet. She lets go of the curtain, smooths her wrinkled hand down one trouser leg and says, he wants you ready when he gets here.

I don't say a word.

She leans back into the room and slams the window closed, leaving a hand-print on the dusty windowsill. I am sitting at the head of the table, balancing my grandfather's old chair on an up-turned linoleum square and the four-range behind me. Grams fills the kettle I bought her for Christmas the week before and sets it on the rear burner below my head.

-I will make you another cup of coffee before he gets here, she says.

On the table in front of me rests a tin of crumbly pastries and assorted coconut cookies, of which I despise. She bought them for me, says she remembered how much I enjoyed them my last visit to her apartment. Also in front of me on the sponge-cushioned table-cloth rests two cups of untouched coffee, one from this morning, one from the afternoon. The yellow placement has accumulated tens of half-moon coffee stains on its surface from guests like me who never drink the coffee, just stir it politely, allowing some of the liquid to escape down the sides onto the table. Some of the stains are from when my grandfather was alive, others from my father's college days, and almost seem like a printed pattern at first glance. Along with unwanted coffee spills, the cloth absorbs the sounds of objects bounced on it, except when Dad rushes in from outside to piss, and hurls his keys onto the table. This leaves the small room quiet, and allows Grams to be heard by everyone in the kitchen except herself.

Defying my father's direct order, she refuses to get a hearing aid.

-I don't need some damn piece of shit buzzing in my ear all day, she told him. 'Sides, I usually know what someone is going to say before they open their mouth, I don't need no damn piece of plastic second-guessing my judgement.

The kettle behind my head starts to whistle. Grams sees the steam and quick hustles over to the range, bumping my chair with her behind. I slide the chair over some to the right, off the broken linoleum, and flick on the Zenith black-and-white that rests on top of the bureau, next to my unpacked duffle-bag. I zoom through the stations and settle at a Frank Sinatra concert on channel 11. Grams places the coffee before me on the silent table as I motion to her if she wants the volume cranked up on the television.

-Hell no! she voices loudly, settling into her chair by the refrigerator, facing the set's screen. I don't need to hear him. That man is so wonderful, he sings with his hands. She smiles, stares at the screen for a moment, pats me on the knee, and says again, That's right, Frank Sinatra sings with his hands!

-Your father thinks I am crazy for wanting to go see him in concert. He says he will only take me if I get a hearing aid. I told him I don't want to go hear him sing, I just want to see the man's gestures....watch his hands.

I turn the volume down on the set and watch for a bit. The audience seems full of swooning old ladies. Frank glides across the stage, letting his hands fly like two unchained songbirds. The crowd applauds his every move, while silently mouthing the song's lyrics. I look over at Grams, and she is doing the same thing, only she does not sing along.

-Sinatra reminds me of my husband, she says. I was married to that man for thirty-three years and never said a damn word to him. I first met him down at the Saint Genarro's Festival in Little Italy. I was only seventeen then, out alone for the first time with my friend Marcie. But when I saw him, I said to Marcie, there's the one for me. Grams takes a sip of her coffee and continues. I went up to him, and had Marcie introduce us. He looked at me like some lost puppy-dog, but I knew exactly what he was thinking.

My grandfather was an immigrant from Italy, and had only been in the country two days when he ran into Grams. My father told me once that he spoke just his native tongue, and could only smile at his children or offer simple expressions in broken English. When Dad would come home from school, his father, sitting at the kitchen table, would say "goodbye," meaning hello, or "hello," meaning goodbye.

-So we got married and raise four children, Grams continues. Marcie asked me how could I marry a man who does not speak English, and I told her it didn't matter to me in the slightest, and it didn't. She stirs the coffee a bit, and then stares out the window.

-When he came home from work, I would watch him wash his great hands, and let him wipe his fingers on my apron. He held me so nice, real sweet like a gentle breeze. Then he would touch my face and say, "love.. I.. you."

-Marcie laughed at me all the time, razzing me about the long letters her boyfriends would write to her. I told her she could take those letters, and the boys who wrote them for that matter, and cram 'em in her hat for they were nothing to me. I had a real man. So what if I never talked to my husband, she cackles, turning her attention back to the television, I always knew what he was thinking anyway!

Grams gets up, grabs the kettle from the stove, and shuffles back to the sink.

-I better make a fresh pot for when your father gets here, she says. You know how much he likes a good cup of coffee.

I don't say a word.

She brings the full pot over to range, and sets it on the same burner behind my head, again bumping the chair with her large butt. I look over at the television and see Frank taking his final bow, the crowd on its feet applauding. I twirl the knob again and settle for a basketball game on channel 5. I sit there watching the players run up and down the court, bouncing into each other, struggling for the ball like a broken sentence. I watch this game, stirring the coffee until it's cold, before realizing the volume is still off.

The last time I saw a basketball game was five years before when I played for my high school team, the Tyrants. The head coach, Pierce, changed the name to Tyrants from Trojans, telling the athletic director he didn't want his guys named after a fucking condom. We pretty much lived up to our name, provoking the occasional away-game riot with rough play and Pierce's sideline antics. My last year playing, we were undefeated going into our final week of games.

Pierce had us practice for three hours a day, six days a week, giving us Sundays off only because the school's gym was used for church services then. He would come into the gym, always wearing a grey suit and red tie that matched the color of his face, and proceed to scream at us for the entire drill.

I say us meaning the guys on the team, but besides our silver and black uniforms, we shared none of the bonds that constitute a team. Besides me, there were two other tall guys, neither of which ever spoke to us or Pierce, just themselves. They would show up for practice and then leave with only the occasional grunt to prove they were not mutes. Then there was Tommy and Mikey, the two guards who acted like miniature Pierces on the court. They controlled the ball, and would never pass to the tall guys. On offense, Tommy would shout a play out, while Mikey zig-zagged around us, signalling for the ball, using us to shield himself from the defense. We just stood there, futilely waving our arms about, bouncing against our opponents to gain a temporary advantage on the floor.

At practice, Pierce started us out running. We ran single-file around the court fifty-one times a session. If one of us dropped out or could not keep up with the pack, then the rest of the team would run another fifty-one laps. After the laps, Pierce would round us up and explain the week's game-plan, which usually involved a detailed analysis of the other team's weaknesses.

-Ladies and gentlemen, he said loudly, I want to win this week's game. You know what it takes to win, leadership. Whatever I say, you do, no questions asked, as if it was gospel. He says this while raising his hands towards the open skylights, slapping his clipboard against the top of his head.

We were not permitted to speak at these meetings. The tall guys sat at the end of the bench, their heads craning towards the ceiling following Pierce' hands. Tommy and Mikey always looked pleased when Pierce spoke, especially when he criticized our play, as if that criticism was not directed at them.

Following our pep-talk, Pierce would stop talking for all of two seconds, allowing blood to flow away from his flushed features. Then the screaming began.

He hopped up and down the sidelines, shouting at me to get my hands up, yelling at the tall guys for being slackers, hollering to Tommy about some new play to try. When Pierce was disgusted with our play, he would run out onto the court and grab our shorts or squeeze our shoulders with his tiny hands, positioning our bodies exactly they way he wanted as if we were puppets and he, our marionette. If Pierce was still not pleased with your performance after that, he would blow the whistle, call you a girl in front of the other guys, and tell you to go sit on the bench with Smik. I spent a lot of time on the bench with Smik.

Smik was the school's Biology teacher and Pierce's token assistant coach. His eyes were a deep aqua-blue, framed by a head of thick, unfashioned brown hair and beard that made his chin seem tremendous. All of his features were massive but not exaggerated. He towered over Pierce by at least two feet, and was easily the largest man I have ever met in my life.

Smik had a handicap though, that when witnessed, made one laugh and view him as if he were four feet tall. He had the voice of a little girl. I heard his voice the first day of school in Biology class. I was sitting next to Dick Anderson, a small, oily kid whose girlfriend sat directly behind him. Smik was calling out the role, and Dick's name topped the list.

-Richard Anderson.....Richard Anderson.....Richard Anderson, Smik sang, sounding like my little sister practicing her Girl Scout campfire songs. After Smik said his name for the third time, Dick turned around from talking to his girl, and shot a big shit-eating smile at him.

-His name is Dick, his girlfriend cackled in a voice deeper than Smik's. We all bust out laughing for what seemed the remainder of the class. Smik's eyes turned a foggy green, as he resorted to pass a sign-up sheet around for the rest of our names.

During class, Smik would show educational movies and relied heavily on his hand-drawn visuals of cells and animal insides. He also had these small creatures and fossils suspended in clear amber or plastic cubes. I liked to rub these molds between my fingers, trying to scrape away the plastic to feel the tiny being. I wondered what it was like to live somewhere where no one could touch you or harm you in a protective casing. Dick liked to hold the molds up to his squinted eye and talk to them. He said, half-jokingly, that he knew the little fuckers could understand what he was saying.

I told my father about these models one day in the car on the way home from practice. Sounds to me like you have a loon for a teacher, he said, cutting me off, the dashboard's red glow reflecting off his face and shirt-collar. I wanted to say more, but dropped the argument, knowing he would not listen.

We won our Monday night game against the team from Saint Mary's High, despite a fist-fight between Tommy and their point guard before half-time. All that stood in our way of a perfect season was the final game on Friday at Winfield Park. We had never played them before. Pierce seemed very confident about the game, more confident than usual. His usual game-plan speech was short and not very specific. It was as if he knew something about their team that we did not.

We arrived somewhat late for the game on Friday, since our driver had never been out to Winfield Park before. He pulled the bus up along-

side the curb facing the school's front door. I grabbed my bag and followed the other guys, single-file, through the main entrance, down the long corridor towards the gym.

The hallway's ceiling consisted entirely of brilliant fluorescent lighting that allowed no shadows on the floor. The light they emitted bounced off Pierce's head, revealing the boiling complexion and matching tie. He lunged towards the gym, angry that the bus driver had temporarily restrained his control.

-Just a minute there sir, an armed security guard said as Pierce arrived at the gym. I can only allow authorized personnel into the gymnasium, he stated, looking very important in his starched, brand new uniform. It was not unusual for these 'rent-a-cops' to be present at one of our away games. In fact, given our reputation, it was almost standard procedure.

-We are the Tyrants, Pierce said, pointing towards us as we caught up with him.

-That so, well you better get a move on...folks inside itching to see you all play. I am out here to insure nothing interferes with the game, he drawled.

Pierce stared at him for a moment, grinned, and said, you do that. I don't want anything to go wrong with this game. The guard smiled back, folding his arms. We trotted one-by-one past the smiling guard. He stepped back when Smik walked by, who had to duck his head under the top of the door-frame.

Inside, the gym was unnervingly quiet. Too quiet. The opposing team was practicing lay-ups and foul shots at the other end of the court. Their balls did not sound against the cushioned-rubber flooring that had numerous markings of some weird pattern on it. The bleachers were packed with their fans. They did not make any sound when we stripped off our sweats, throwing them behind our cheerleaders pom-poms. The crowd only waved their arms excitedly at us and each other.

I looked up at the scoreboard, surveying the lights and period indicator. I noticed that the horn had been replaced by a revolving strobe flasher. Then I realized the secret Pierce had kept from us at practice, the bit of information he based our attack on that made him so confident of victory. We were playing at a deaf school.

The other guys figured this out too, and were laughing about it during our stretching exercises.

-I've never *heard* of this team before, cracked Tommy.

-Shhh, be quiet, they might *hear* you, Mikey replied.

The two tall guys did not seem to care one way or the other. They were as quiet as the silent audience.

The game did not go according to Pierce's plan. I lost the jump-ball, expecting the ref to blow the whistle. He tapped our shoulders instead. Tommy and Mikey were clowning around on offense, taking shots from outside the key, ignoring the tall guys. In return, the tall guys were slow to get back on defense.

The other team played smart, taking advantage of our slack. Their guard used hand signals to call a play, which fouled up our guards. Their big men were boxing our tall guys out on the boards. I could not get over the complete silence of the whole thing. Even the ball seemed a whisper when Mikey dribbled it down court. We were a team whose motivation rested in the applause we received. Their fans would not move when we scored, but would wave hysterically when their players sank a basket.

Pierce soon broke the silence. He ran back and forth on the sidelines, throwing his hands to the sky, kicking at the air with his feet.

-Lazy motherfuckers, run the ball! ..... No, no! ..... Shithead, no! ..... You fucking no good girlies! he spewed at us, face boiling over his jacket, down his tie. Whenever Pierce was ready to really lose it, as I had seen him do only once before, he would spit his swear words together in one rolling line. The ref pointed his whistle at Pierce, warning him about the profanity. Pierce stared straight at him, the veins in his eyeballs ready to explode.

We weren't doing anything to help his situation. Their team ran us down, anticipating all our moves, getting better. After every basket, they would huddle together and pat each other's hands as a gesture of comradery. Whenever they did this, the crowd waved its approval. Tommy and Mikey were yelling at each other, trying plays we never worked before in practice. Even our cheerleaders gave up, returning to the bench where Smik sat.

Just before half-time, Tommy passed me the ball for an easy lay-up. I threw up a brick that their center swatted back in my face. Pierce went nuts.

-You fucking girl!, he screamed to me while leaping onto the court. I looked over at him and then at the crowd, who did not hear the remark. For a second, I wondered how ridiculous Pierce must look to these people. They must enjoy his animation the same way I liked Saturday morning cartoons.

I slumped over to where Pierce was raving, giving him the *what did I do wrong now* look coach. He was not playing.

-You no good fucking shit for brains! he said hoarsely. You want to cost me the fucking championship? The ref runs over next to me, points to Pierce and then to the door, exaggerating his movements for the crowd.

Pierce lunged at the ref as if he were a boxer who had just heard the opening round bell sound. Smik sprung off the bench and grabbed Pierce from behind, lifting him in the air like a baby. The rent a cop was no where to be found.

-Your coach is out of the game...two counts of foul and abusive language, the ref tells us while smoothing out his shirt, tucking it back into his trousers. The flasher indicated half-time. Smik comes back from the locker room, removes the whistle from around his neck, and says in his girl-like tone, I am coach for the second half. None of us laugh.

The crowd sees Smik now for the first time as he stands before us, sketching plays on the glossy bench with his huge thumb. Only one couple, a guy and girl, get up from their seats and leave the gym hand in hand. They were smiling at each other, staring into one another's eyes. The rest of the fans marvel busily at Smik's awesome presence, completely unaware of his voice.

Pierce stood fuming in the locker room staring out at us from the tiny, dust-spotted window of the coaches' office. Smik noticed this, and instead of slumping on the bench, blocked the window from us by standing before it, spreading his arms out like the security guard did before.

Our play picked up a little in the second half, probably a result of Pierce not screaming anymore. Now the place was dead silent. Even we did not exchange any words. It was as if the game was on a television set with the volume turned down.

Smik seemed relaxed by the silence. Rather than slumping on the bench or hiding behind a slide-projector, he moved his immense body along the sidelines like a great lion. The crowd kept one eye on the game, the other on Smik.

Things were clicking again on-court. Tommy sank two quick three-pointers, and the tall guys hustled back on defense, blocking several shots and out-rebounding the other team. Smik was a new man on the sidelines. He would wave us into position on defense, signalling plays with his fingers. I noticed how bright his eyes were when he applauded our moves.

Although we did not speak, our team was communicating better than ever. Mikey passed the ball up the key just as Tommy broke for top, setting up an easy basket. The other tall guys actually seemed to be in this game, rather than just going through motions. With only seconds left in the fourth period, we were within a basket of tying the game.

The crowd waves their arms frantically as I sink a basket and draw a foul. Our cheerleaders are up now, not cheering, but waving their silver and black pom-poms back at the audience.

I stand on the foul-line, looking over at Smik as the ref passes me the ball. Smik stands besides the bench, so tall his head seems to touch the gold-colored ceiling, folding both arms around his trunk, smiling back at us. Mikey pats one of the tall guys on the back gently, not rough like when he uses their bodies to shield against the defense. I smile at this, enjoying the game for the first time in my two years on the team.

The players around the key remind me of some family around a dinner table, more absorbed in conversation than actual eating. I bounce the ball several times on the cushioned floor, then suspend it before my head with both palms, ready to shoot. The crowd stops waving their hands, and sit rigid on the bleachers. Our cheerleaders clench their pom-poms at their sides, waiting. Smik still stands besides them, blocking the door behind which Pierce sits, exiled. The ref stands under the basket, whistle hanging off his lower lip. Everything in the room was still.

Just as I am about to release the ball, the guy who left before hand-in-hand with his girlfriend bolts through the gym door behind the basket, slam-

ming into the ref's back, his arms waving frantically, confused. I didn't follow through with the shot, as Pierce had constantly ordered us to in practice, instead focusing on this guy's violent gestures, fluttering like some lame bird. My teammates look down at the floor, while the other players rush over to where this guy is going crazy. Even the crowd did not understand his gestures.

His scream breaks the silence.

Smik ran over to him, and tried to calm his hands like he did before to Pierce. Caught in Smik's grasp, he quieted down enough to point towards the door. Although the game was not over, the crowd filed off the bleachers towards the door, each one pursing their lips as if they know something's wrong.

Outside in the hallway, Smik kneeled over the body of a quivering girl, her arms behind her back in handcuffs. The girl's boyfriend pointed over to the security guard who inched away from the crowd. One of their players went up to him and waved his hands slowly in what appeared to be sign language. The guard did not understand.

-Sh..sh..she threw herself at me like she was trying to kill me, throwing her arms all over the place. It was all I could do to keep her from hurting me...from hurting herself, the guard said in a defensive tone. I looked over to where Smik was stroking the girl's hair with his immense hands. Then I look down at my own hands and notice I am still holding the ball.

-This girl has had an epileptic seizure, and needs medical help immediately, a strong voice said, soaring above the crowd seemingly directed right at the guard. She wasn't attacking you, she was crying for help, now give me your keys this instant! At first I couldn't believe it, but the voice was Smik's, loud and confident, not a hint of his girlish pitch. He unlocked the girl's singing hands, and stroked her face as she slowly came around. I noticed again the size of his hands, so big they could easily crush her head if he wasn't careful. The crowd gathered around him, watching him like they understood every word he just said. The guard was unaware Smik's his previous voice, only me and the other guys recognized the drastic change.

The ambulance arrived and parked next to our school bus. We followed the paramedics down the shadowless hall with the rest of the crowd. Smik got in the back with the girl and waved to us as he shut the door, the vehicle's tires kicking up silent gravel to the deaf crowd. Everything was quiet again.

-What about the goddamn game! You never finished the fucking shot, the game's a tie! I looked back at the door and there's Pierce, escaped from his banishment to the locker room. Then I realized I was still holding the ball.

-The coach is right, the ref said to us, pulling the ball from my side. We're not done with the game yet boys. Most of the crowd stayed in the parking lot, apparently not concerned with the game's outcome after the girl's near-death incident.

We followed Pierce down the hall again towards the gym. This time there's no security guard blocking the door, although I wished there was. Inside, the gym doesn't seem the same without Smik. Only a handful of the crowd remained, and they were busy zipping their jackets up and putting on mittens. Our cheerleaders sat on the bench without their pom-poms. Even the guys on the key appeared different. The other team was just a bunch of bodies. Tommy and Mikey look busily back and forth from the scoreboard to Pierce, who stood at the gym's door, away from the ref. The tall guys had their backs to the net, looking out the door where Smik spoke only minutes ago. What seemed like a dinner-time conversation before, now was as warm as a cold cup of coffee.

The ref passes me the ball again while Pierce starts yelling from the door.

-Alright let's go! Let's go! Sink it and we win! Win.....!

I heard Pierce's screaming get louder as I grabbed the ball and shot it, not aiming it or taking my time like he drilled us in practice. The ball went up, bounced off the backboard and swished through the basket. The flasher indicated the game's end. Tyrants win. Undefeated.

Just before the ball hit the floor I thought about Smik and how I didn't really care if we won the game or not. Tommy and Mikey grab their sweats, draped over the bench where our make-shift plays were sketched by a huge thumb. Pierce called us over for a post-game cheer, but I followed the tall guys out the door past him as the ball bounced noisily down the cushioned yellow flooring.

The kettle behind my head whistles, and Grams, seeing the steam rising, rushes over to grab it.

-Goodness, he is here already, Grams says, opening the kitchen window. I hear a car door slam on the street below, as she places some coffee on the table for my father. I flick the television set off, and place my chair flat against the floor, enjoying the last few moments I have of this. He rushes through the door and flings his keys onto the kitchen table, making a loud sound as they land.

-I see you are ready to go, he says to me, pointing towards my unpacked duffle-bag. I do not say a word.

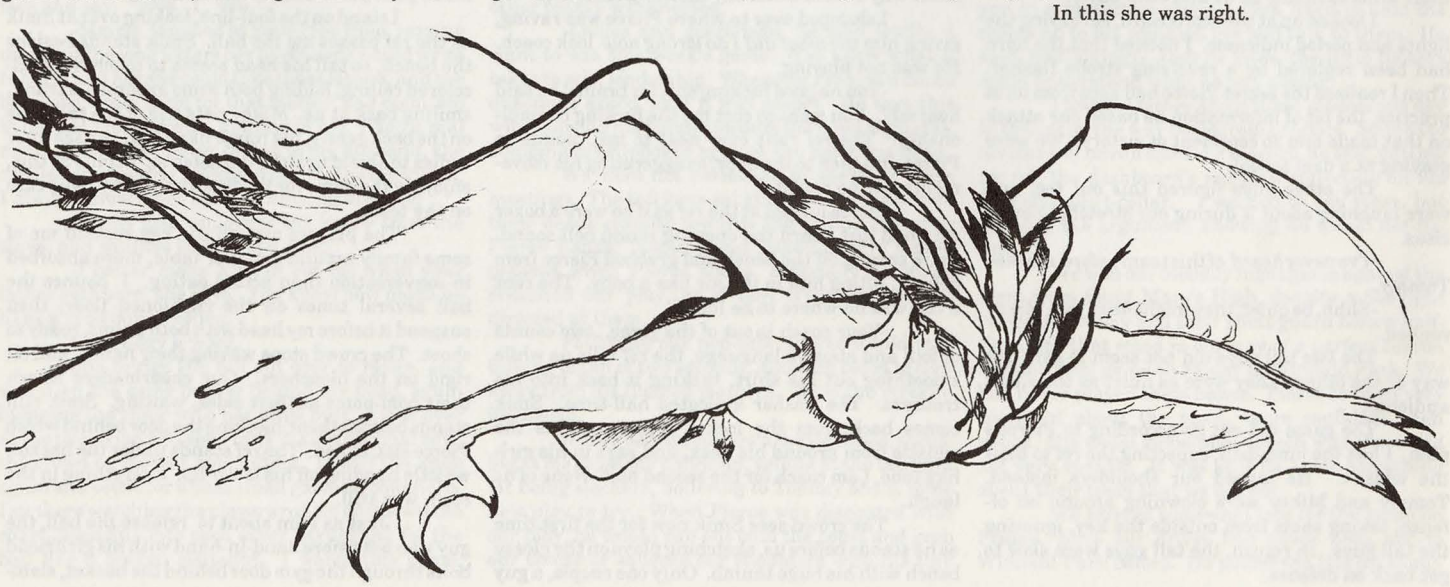
Grams points towards the coffee for him. He shakes his tempered head at this, mutters something to himself, then goes to the bathroom to take a piss. I sit in the chair, staring out the window, wondering what it must be like to live in a protective casing where no one can hurt you.

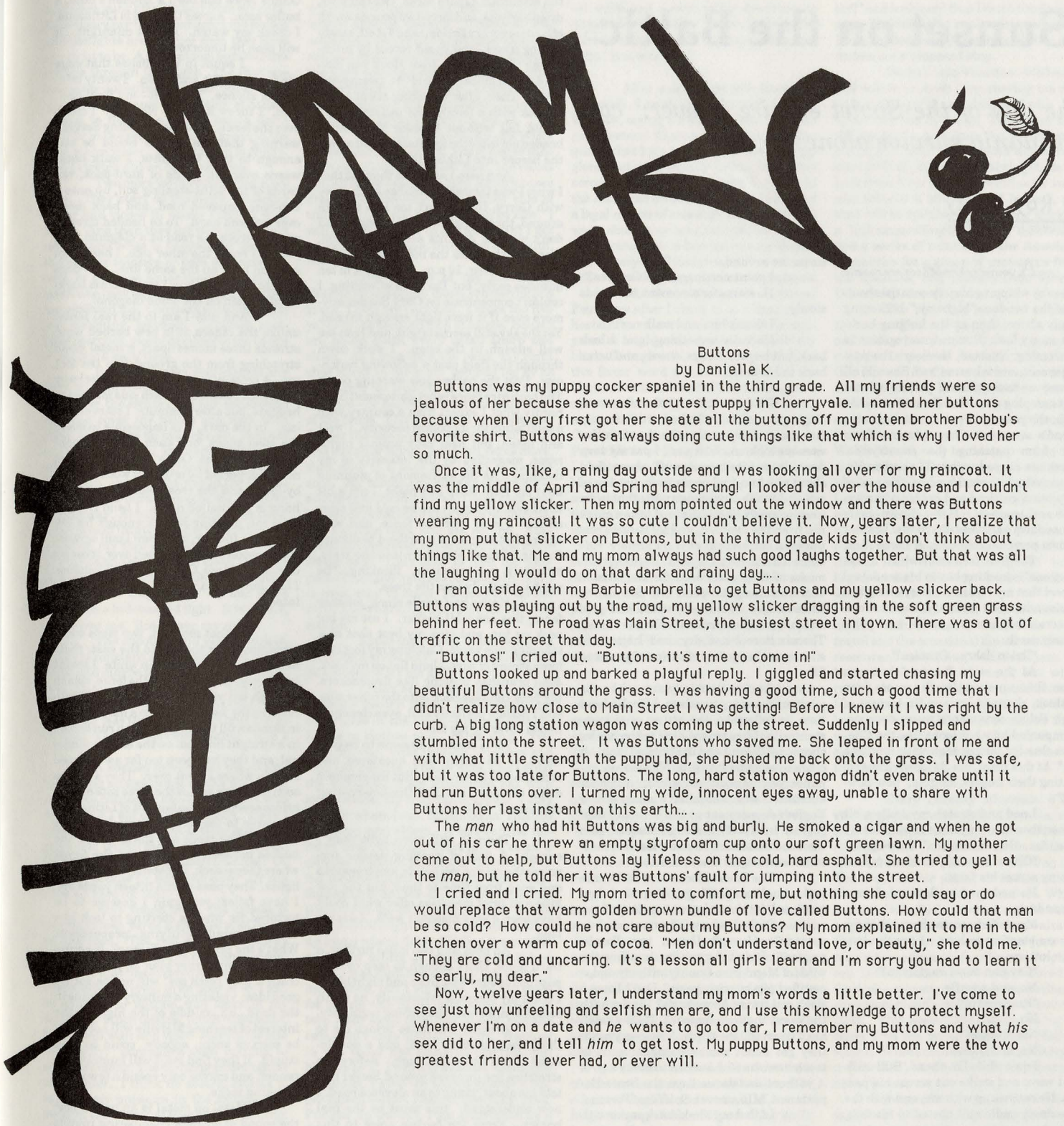
For a moment, neither Grams or I move, our bodies suspended in the amber light of the tiny room. Then I stand up, smooth my jeans against my legs and walk over to where she is placing a spoon out for father's coffee.

-Goodbye, I say, wishing I meant the opposite.

-It is ok, she whispers while touching my fingers, I understand.

In this she was right.





Buttons
by Danielle K.

Buttons was my puppy cocker spaniel in the third grade. All my friends were so jealous of her because she was the cutest puppy in Cherryvale. I named her buttons because when I very first got her she ate all the buttons off my rotten brother Bobby's favorite shirt. Buttons was always doing cute things like that which is why I loved her so much.

Once it was, like, a rainy day outside and I was looking all over for my raincoat. It was the middle of April and Spring had sprung! I looked all over the house and I couldn't find my yellow slicker. Then my mom pointed out the window and there was Buttons wearing my raincoat! It was so cute I couldn't believe it. Now, years later, I realize that my mom put that slicker on Buttons, but in the third grade kids just don't think about things like that. Me and my mom always had such good laughs together. But that was all the laughing I would do on that dark and rainy day... .

I ran outside with my Barbie umbrella to get Buttons and my yellow slicker back. Buttons was playing out by the road, my yellow slicker dragging in the soft green grass behind her feet. The road was Main Street, the busiest street in town. There was a lot of traffic on the street that day.

"Buttons!" I cried out. "Buttons, it's time to come in!"

Buttons looked up and barked a playful reply. I giggled and started chasing my beautiful Buttons around the grass. I was having a good time, such a good time that I didn't realize how close to Main Street I was getting! Before I knew it I was right by the curb. A big long station wagon was coming up the street. Suddenly I slipped and stumbled into the street. It was Buttons who saved me. She leaped in front of me and with what little strength the puppy had, she pushed me back onto the grass. I was safe, but it was too late for Buttons. The long, hard station wagon didn't even brake until it had run Buttons over. I turned my wide, innocent eyes away, unable to share with Buttons her last instant on this earth... .

The *man* who had hit Buttons was big and burly. He smoked a cigar and when he got out of his car he threw an empty styrofoam cup onto our soft green lawn. My mother came out to help, but Buttons lay lifeless on the cold, hard asphalt. She tried to yell at the *man*, but he told her it was Buttons' fault for jumping into the street.

I cried and I cried. My mom tried to comfort me, but nothing she could say or do would replace that warm golden brown bundle of love called Buttons. How could that man be so cold? How could he not care about my Buttons? My mom explained it to me in the kitchen over a warm cup of cocoa. "Men don't understand love, or beauty," she told me. "They are cold and uncaring. It's a lesson all girls learn and I'm sorry you had to learn it so early, my dear."

Now, twelve years later, I understand my mom's words a little better. I've come to see just how unfeeling and selfish men are, and I use this knowledge to protect myself. Whenever I'm on a date and *he* wants to go too far, I remember my Buttons and what *his* sex did to her, and I tell *him* to get lost. My puppy Buttons, and my mom were the two greatest friends I ever had, or ever will.

Sunset on the Baltic

The day of the Soviet empire is over: can Lithuania survive alone?

By Roy Kesey

A young police officer scares me witless by whipping his jeep onto the shoulder of the two-lane "highway," beckoning sternly at me, then at the bulging backpack at my feet. But no interrogation is forthcoming: instead, he clears the passenger seat, and takes me from Suwalki all the way up to Szypliszki, pulling off at a quiet camping grounds. Two miles to the north, the pavement peters out as I enter Poland's answer to Pennsylvania, farm after farm patching the countryside. Fences are draped with wild raspberries, and proud white storks adorn the roof of every barn, rattling and bobbing like living weathervanes. Horse-drawn carts bounce down nameless dirt roads. I gather my own personal collection of horse-flies.

The first farmer of which I "ask directions" is bucking hay in his sandals. I suspect that my Polish is paltry enough to be misunderstood perfectly, but I have to get across his farm. I smile, and point vaguely north.

"Dzien dobry. Granica?"

At the word "border," his eyes widen; then a nervous laugh escapes from his thick, chapped lips, and a torrent of rough Polish consonants pours over me, accompanied by what looks like the Charades clue for "angry man with machine gun." At this point, his children chime in, pointing their fingers, singing, "pow-pow-pow!"

I nod and stretch my smile a bit further, then throw my hands up in friendly surrender. "Nie rozumiem." I try again.

"OK milo...uh...," I mime myself walking across his farm.

He nods and smiles and throws his hands up.

My smile is now so broad that my ears are starting to hurt. I try the language lottery.

"Czy pan mowi angielsku?"

No, and a smile.

"Francusku?"

No.

Niemiecku?"

No, and a scowl.

I quit while I'm ahead. Still smiling, I wave and strike out across his pasture. He catches up with me, and with the same dusty smile still pasted to his face, turns me around.

I point north again. "Granica?"

He stares for a moment, then nods slowly.

I thank him and walk north.

He calls something, and I look back, but he just shrugs, waves, and turns back to his barn.

Birds dart through the afternoon, singing across fields flecked with horses, a few sheep, dairy cattle with that familiar vacuous look. At 7:15 p.m., I put my tarp down in a small square of wheat field about two hundred yards from a string of red-and-white striped sign posts that looks conspicuously like a border. I take a quick nip from the canteen, and lie back to rest under a darkening sky. Farmers ride home on ancient bicycles. Another armada of flies assembles for the attack. Children's laughter peals over the waving wheat edged in flowers, white and gold and purple, whose names I will never know. The air is cool and dry, and I watch in silence as the apricot of sunset ripens and fills.

As countless ladybugs make the pilgrimage up my pantlegs, I finally have time to reflect on the string of circumstances that has led me here to the border shared by Poland and the Soviet Union. A chance volleyball trip to Vilnius on my junior year abroad in Oxford; a chance encounter with the chairwoman of the English department at the Vilnius Pedagogical Institute; a chance lecture, and then the invitation to come teach American literature for the summer...

The Soviet blockade of Lithuania had complicated things, but, as I had pondered in the relative comfort of my room in Oxford, who really needs a visa, anyway? Haven't I seen two *Rambo* movies? Didn't I grow up hunting the wilds of Mendocino County with my dad, a certified pig-hunting guide? Don't I own a sleek red Swiss Army knife? And what's the worst that can happen? If they catch me, I'll just tell the truth: how angry could they get about someone sneaking in to teach literature? I decided to make a go of it without assistance from the State Department, MI5, or even *Soldier of Fortune*.

I filled my khaki backpacks with the essentials, (spare socks, two cameras, dried apricots, and forty-two pounds worth of contemporary fiction,) and set off, establishing a new land speed record by hitchhiking the 600 miles from Hoek van Holland to Legnica, Poland in twenty-one hours. Then, after dawdling about in Bialystok with a family who insisted that I would fall without hearing the shot, I headed north for the forests that spill across the border into Lithuania.

And here I am. The thought that I wish I was throwing a frisbee on the levy with Gerry, that it isn't too late to turn around, that things could go wrong, that I don't want to die flits across my vision, then vanishes into the indigo night.

H-hour, 10 p.m. Actually, I'm ten minutes early, but I'm tired of waiting. I couldn't concentrate on Gary Snyder anymore even if it were light enough to read. Yet the sky still seems bright, and I can see well enough in the open. I walk down through the field past a bellowing watchcow. Past the barber pole warning posts. The barbwire fence is not quite waist high: hardly what I expect from a country with a reputation for diabolical security. I wait and listen, but hear only animal night-noise, magnified by the intensity of my listening. As the excitement of planning kept me from sleep last night, I am a bit tired, but my senses are as cold and clear as ice. I step over the fence, and wait again. Nothing but a heartbeat to disturb the air. I move stealthily into the trees, strangely self-conscious, thinking, "he moves stealthily into the trees."

Maybe half a mile along, another fence, this one a bit higher. I set my big pack on top, and give my best shot at a standing side vault. Catching my foot on a loose strand of wire, I land flat on my back, dead branches popping like firecrackers. My pack tumbles back onto the other side, and I huddle perfectly still, eyes clenched, hands covering my face.

All is silent. I deserve to be captured, to be drawn and quartered and stretched on an ant-hill. But the shadows don't explode into Kalishnikov-bearing robo-cops. All is silent.

There is still more light than I expect. A field of swaying nettles surprises the skin on my hands, and trees slap and snag from time to time, but the low hills and brief meadows offer what could have been a very pleasant walk. I am too loud.

An hour and two miles further, a third fence, short enough to step over. I pass ponds busy with frogs and night birds. I trust my compass reluctantly, as north seems to alter with disturbing regularity.

Another two miles brings me to thick trees, a small pond, and a double-fence about three feet high. Before me stretches the unpaved ground Sergei had told me about, rising to an elevated road. I now understand: this must be the real border. From the barber poles to this double fence has been a no-man's land, a buffer zone. Across the road is Lithuania. I check my watch. Almost midnight. It will soon be tomorrow.

I squat in the bushes that edge the fence to wait and listen. Twenty minutes of silence. This is it—my final decision. I throw a stone. Nothing. I climb over the fence. Nothing. Heeding Sergei's warning that the ground would be soft enough to take footprints, I walk backwards over ten yards of hard-pack, ten yards of the print-stealing soil, up onto a two-lane unpaved road, and back down over soft and hard. To be headed directly north, I cross the road at a diagonal, and just as I reach the other side, I hear dogs and run back on the same line. The dogs are not for me. Again I walk across backwards, again on the same diagonal.

And now I am to the real fence: unlike the others, it is new barbed wire, strands three inches apart, a metal mesh stretching from the ground to a ten foot top. A cross-piece extending an overhang of barbwire two feet on each side makes me hesitate, but after a minute, I start climbing. In the dark, it is impossible to avoid the steel snags, and each new handhold tears at my palms. Oddly, the whole barbed net is supported by ordinary wooden four-by-fours, and the crosspiece for the overhang is just nailed down. I bend it away from me, slanting it back enough for my front pack to clear, but when I pull against the crosspiece to hoist myself over, it comes completely loose, throwing me off balance. I fall, landing on my feet with both packs intact.

At that moment, two jeeps come screaming over the hill to the east, their headlights drenching me in white. I sprint back across the road, vault the fence, splash through ten yards of water and dive into reeds as the jeeps scratch to a halt. Shouts in Russian fill the air. But I had run across in a straight line, not on the earlier diagonal, and they had been too far away to see exactly where I went over. They stop too soon and come across the three sets of footprints seemingly leading out of Lithuania, ten yards to the east of where I had just crossed. The reeds are thick, as are the bushes between the pond and the forest where they search. Constant yelling. Spotlights. They pass within fifteen yards me. I have failed: yet again I deserve to be tortured for what is starting to look like folly of mind-stultifying proportions. What's the price tag for failing? It occurs to me that my earlier plan to "just tell the truth if they catch me" will not be such a good idea: violating a military blockade in the dead...uh...middle of the night in the interest of teaching Melville will not likely be seen as such: *nobody* could be that stupid. If they find me, I will humbly surrender, and maybe only spend a few years breaking rocks.

Metal on metal is an ugly noise: the sound of soldiers chambering rounds

in unseen guns lifts the hair from my neck. Fear clears my head, and again my senses and thoughts are sharper then they have any right to be. A few random bursts of fire crackle through the night. The first one leaves me quivering with fear, but nothing hits me: they must be shooting at noises, or just to flush me out. I hunch down further in the reeds, up to my knees in the luke-warm water. My feet begin to cramp, and I stretch out on the hummock.

Two more jeeps come. They have dogs. They start at the fence, sweeping closer and closer to where I twitch with fright. And then they are past me. I don't understand what is happening: perhaps the dogs or soldiers or both are incompetent, or perhaps water really does throw scent like they say in the movies, but they have missed me. Constant shouting, talking, coughing, spitting. Constant spotlight searches, slashing closer to the fringe of my pond each time.

Both my packs and clothes are dark and unreflective. I hide my pale face whenever the lights cut their arc around me, and cover my hands and neck with mud. Voices are all aroung now. Feet are cramping again. I am hyper-aware, but very, very tired. Again they run the dogs, and again, once all the way to the bushes at the ponds border, maybe six or seven yards away. At each approach of the dogs, I pull myself into the mud of the hummock, pressing my face against the cool reeds. Thoughts and senses seem clear, though I find myself starting to fade. More shooting. Then a single "shot" at me: all is bathed in a hideous red light. It is a flare, right over me. But I have my reeds.

The shooting and yelling quiets. There is constant movement on the roads, jeeps and maybe trucks. I've lost count of how many guards there are: the voices change, people move—it seems that there are never less than five, sometimes ten or twelve. They are always talking. It is 2 a.m.

A sudden noise rivets me awake: I am lying almost prone on the hummock now, face cupped in arms. My watch says 3 a.m. and I am shivering madly. Have I really been asleep? Still they talk, still jeeps and trucks move constantly. Could this be some kind of military exercise? Or a "real" escape by someone else? Or are they all here for me?

More voices now. The closest is maybe fifteen yards away, parallel to me on the road. The rest stretch out away from me to the east. The dogs once again. The dark that has covered me is just starting to fade into grey: in an hour or so, I will be exposed to anyone who looks in my direction. Much talking, much movement. I wait and wait and wait. Mosquitos bite constantly: adrenaline does nothing to stop the itching. The morning grows lighter and lighter. I think up several stories to explain my presence in the middle of a pond at the border at four in the morning: all seem a bit inadequate. I hear the dogs whining and scratching, but they are no longer making sweeps. Thoughts and senses are absolutely clear once again. I am still frightened by the dogs, but pass the time devising insults for guards that are too stupid to find me. I realize that somewhere—at the big fence?—I lost my flashlight. Always there are voices.

It is 5:30. I have been in the water for five and a half hours. There seems to be even more jeep movement now; the voices still all to the east. It is light enough to see dragonflies hunting on the other side of the pond. If I am to go, it must be now. I will backdoor them to the west until I am out of hearing range, then head due south. Now.

The sounds of my movement cloaked by the angry diesel sputtering of a truck, I pull my packs on. I cross the five yards to the bank an inch at a time. Senses are liquid glass, every detail sharp and clean. As I step onto the bank, my right shoe sticks in the mud: seconds lag by as I struggle to free it. I see huge troop carriers—or barracks?—on the other side of the fence. I have covered ten yards; as I enter the trees, a dog barks, I hear a yell and sirens or horns. I run ten yards more, then slow to a pace less likely to get me shot. My hands are already in the air—anything to avoid a bullet. I hear dogs, and branches breaking a long ways behind me, but I glance back and see no one. Stay completely in cover, never leaving the trees. Never stop. Only slow to read the compass. Trust the compass completely. Light is good, stay in cover, do not run, do not slow. Dogs barking, but faint, far off. See no one.

Apparently they didn't followed far. Don't know why. Have I escaped...or has someone let me go?

I relax enough to breathe deeply after the second fence. Barbwire is less hazardous in the light—I do not tear my hands or clothes now. Birds sing. Two does browse. Wild turkeys. Flowers and wild raspberries. I never stop, and I trust the compass. I am exhausted but with every stride, my confidence grows. I stay in cover where I can. Mushrooms. Thistles in bloom, and alders. A soft sunrise diffuses down through quiet air. I catch a glimpse of Polish farmland, the same Polish farmland that I left...only yesterday? Somewhere not far off, a cow voices displeasure at the daily milk routine. I walk downhill through a last timber stand, then up into a wheat field. Kissing the ground no longer seems as important as it had when I was hunched down in the water. I have failed, but I am alive, and the price for failing was light: soft white rivers of torn flesh swell from my hands, but the cuts aren't deep enough to hurt. Walking in wet shoes has blistered my feet, but blisters heal. I will buy another flashlight. Laughing, I give the stupid guards a finger-raised salute. I am wonderfully tired. Further up the hill, I am confronted by a farmer's wife: I disarm her with my broadest smile and a request for directions to Szypliszki. I am alive. I am in Poland. The farms are awake, stretching in the cool light. It is morning.

After a day's rest with friends in Bialystok, I catch the train back down to Warsaw, toying with a few ideas for alternate routes to Vilnius. One friend had suggested that I try to join the circle of smugglers that occasionally bribes their way across the border. Or maybe someone in the American consulate could help me find a legal means of crossing, though my failure to obtain anything but insults from the Soviet consulate in London had me skeptical. Or maybe I'll just give up: I'm not sure I have the energy for any more adventures.

Who doesn't believe in miracles? Four days after I check in to a local youth hostel, the rumor that a diplomatic compromise might soon replace the military blockade begins to take a more substantive form: word on the street is that the blockade will be lifted if Lithuania puts a moratorium on its declaration of independence, which they will be willing to do if Gorbachev agrees to meet with Lithuanian Prime Minister Prunskiene and President Landsbergis. Though none of these things had actually happened yet, petrol is now available to private citizens for the first time in weeks, and obtaining a visa is once more a possibility.

With the help of a guardian angel moonlighting as a secretary in the American consulate, I bypass the thugs that man the doors at the Soviet consulate. Ten phone calls, six telexes, twenty-five dollars and several days in line later, I walk into a bright Warsaw morning with a work visa in my hand.

I awake to the gasping of train wheels as they strain to a stop. For the second time in thirteen days, I am approaching the Polish border with Lithuania at midnight, but this time my success seems assured. Dim lights and the bright clicking of military boots bring me to semi-consciousness. A mustachioed Polish border guard seizes my passport and yells, "Are you speaking Polish?"

Not one to quibble about tense, I reply that I would prefer English or German.

German it is, though his tendency to start yelling his questions in German and finish yelling them in Polish is a bit disconcerting. I end up guessing at the content of most of his questions and being wrong a lot, but I have nothing to hide. After sticking a grease-begrimed hand to the bottom of my pack and retracting it with the facial expression of a man who has just been arm deep in bat diarrhea, he concludes the interview.

His counterpart on the Soviet side of the border surprises me with polite, coherent English and a sense of humor. Inspecting my sleek red Swiss Army knife, he asks, "Is this meant for customs officer?" and is pleased that I catch the double-edge. He shakes his head at the price of my Russian dictionary, stamps my visa, and wishes me a pleasant stay.

We pull into Vilnius at 9:30 a.m., and within an hour I am sharing tea and cheese-and-garlic sandwiches with my hosts from the Institute. The rumor that the border is now open for petrol shipments may be true, but those who have it aren't selling, so the plan to bring students back from their homes to Vilnius for summer schools is abandoned. Instead, my time will be split between editing work on a Lithuanian/English travel dictionary, and a series of lectures on the American Romantics for a group of professors from the Institute, and possibly from Vilnius University as well.

The blockade has also emptied the stores of natural gas, paper, ink, sugar and vodka but people dip into personal supplies to provide me with everything that I need. The lectures are a daunting challenge: never have I experienced such widespread academic enthusiasm, such active trade in the marketplace of thought. Since the Soviet occupation at the close of World War II, only texts approved by the authorities in Moscow are allowed to be translated. Original texts in any Western Language are rare, and contemporary literary criticism all but nonexistent. The students and professors here possess an almost manic desire to absorb the scholarship of their Western colleagues: what began as daily one-hour lectures became daily four-hour seminars.

Days are filled with discussion, nights with research, week-ends with travel and the occasional dinner at the one restaurant in Vilnius with live jazz. I learn far more than I teach, but what rattles about my mind for hours after each late-night talk-fest has less to do with border policy and Lithuanian cuisine than with the peculiar notion of truth that is presently evolving from the "pravda" of the past fifty years.

Every Tuesday afternoon, a Soviet cargo plane arrives in Lithuania, setting down at Vilnius airport like a bloated steel pterodactyl. Yet even the most disinterested observer will note something different about this plane, or rather, about the treatment that its cargo receives. When the massive belly doors open, and the boxes begin to trail out, the crowd that waits on the tarmac contains more than just the requisite contingent of uniformed employees. In fact, uniforms are outnumbered by the drab overcoats of Lithuanian civilians, who stand silently, many with tear-stained faces. This seemingly endless string of boxes does not bring grain from Mother Russia. It does not bring tea from Georgia or silk from Uzbekistan. These boxes are full of bones.

Some of these bones form whole skeletons. More often, they are just scattered human remnants; a femur, a hand,

in some cases just a few teeth. And they are part of the legacy bequeathed to Lithuania by the late Joseph Stalin.

Few groups suffered so complete a genocide in the late Forties and early Fifties as did the intelligentsia of this most vocal of the Baltic republics. In scenes reminiscent of Hitler's Germany, they and their families were packed into cattle cars so tightly that hundreds suffocated on the trip to the ice of Siberia. The lucky ones were shot on arrival: others, left to die, survived a matter of weeks, long enough to scratch shallow graves into frozen ground and mark them with tree-bark headstones.

A few records still exist, most notably the photographs of Juozas Kazlauskas in his book *Teesie (Let It Be.)* In one shot, a man sits in the snow, the skin of his face seemingly freeze-dried to cheekbones and forehead. His stare is as vacant as the bare-scraped earth around him. On the facing page, a skull rests on its side, alone in frozen grass.

Most of the bodies were placed in common graves, and will never be identified. Whole family lines stretching back to Lithuania's medieval rule of much of what was to become Eastern Europe were wiped out. For them, there is no one to light a candle, no one to say a prayer.

And yet, for all the horror, this is 1991: Stalin has been dead for thirty-eight years, and his reign of falsehood is slowly being dragged into the light. Life in Vilnius, in Tashkent and Odessa and Irkutsk is staggering forward toward regained regional autonomy, and in some cases toward democracy and the development of a free market. But in another sense, the inhabitants of these cities and thousands of others across the disintegrating Soviet empire are looking backward; back to a time when "Truth" was not the title of the greatest instrument of disseminating state lies. What does it mean to live in a society where the concept of veracity has been obliterated? And how does one escape it? How does one build a new notion of truth?

During a visit to the resort town of Druskininkai in southern Lithuania, I made the acquaintance of two charming Russian girls, both of whom study music at the Junior Conservatory in Moscow. They were exceptionally bright, and headily immersed in the political and economic reshaping of their country. Their intellectual curiosity was at a far higher pitch than that of the average sixteen-year-old American student, and I was continually amazed at the energy with which they discussed the changes taking place around them.

Yet there was something else, something more remarkable, and considerably less encouraging. In addition to studying musical theory, musical history, Russian language and literature, and mathematics, both girls, like students everywhere, must participate in a daily "War Preparation Class." There, they have learned some extraordinary things: that there exists a constant threat from Germany, Mongolia, and China, all of whom have armies massed at the border, ready and waiting to attack; that all Europeans hate Russians, and would prefer their extinction; that the Soviet Union had to "join their communist brothers" in Afghanistan to protect them from an imminent American invasion.

The last of these claims was "confirmed" by a show on Moscow television that evening. On the Russian comeback to MTV, we witnessed part of a three-hour concert given by musicians who were also soldiers that had served in Afghanistan. The songs spoke glowingly of the glorious cause, and were accompanied by a glitzy light show and footage of stalwart, square-jawed proletarian soldiers being embraced and blessed by ecstatic natives. On stage, young men in berets and old men in medals sung refrain after refrain of the wonders of war. *Glasnost* indeed.

Later, in the shoreline village of Palanga, I finally obtain a treasured copy of the *Moscow News* in English. The back page article was written by a Mr. Alexander Kabakov, and ostensibly gives new information about Konstantin Orlov, the Soviet journalist who chose to leak Khruschev's 1956 *Report to the 20th Congress of the Communist Party* to a young British journalist by the name of John Rettie. In June of this year, *Moscow News* ran a recent interview with Rettie, in which he speculated that in fact Orlov's leak had been a KGB plant. Mr. Kabakov's article contains a reply from Orlov, discussing the years of abuse at the hands of prison officials that were the direct result of his leak, as well as the refusal of any publication to accept his work since his release from jail. This latest disclosure seems to make it clear that Orlov is anything but a KGB operative: rather, he is a courageous man who chose to expose Stalin's crimes to the West, and who has suffered horribly for so doing.

The real focus of Kabakov's article, however, is not Orlov. Nor is it Rettie. It is Kabakov's struggle—indeed, the struggle of every Soviet citizen—to cope with a workaday world that has no means by which to discern truth from falsehood. In 1956, it seemed that Orlov had told Rettie the straight facts. In June, it seemed as though Orlov had lied. Today, it seems that Orlov told Rettie—and Kabakov—the truth after all. The point is that because of the fantastical matrix of whole-, half-, and untruths that make up "information" in the Soviet Union, Kabakov and all his fellow citizens have no way of knowing for sure. His last two paragraphs deserve to be quoted in full:

> Now under the M(oscow) N(ews) windows, near the fence at the burnt-down part of our building, there is a noisy "Hyde Park" becoming half-crazy right before our eyes, something like an oriental bazaar. And I think: suppose a door opens right now, a person comes in and starts persuading me that this whole islet of wild free-thinking has been set up by the Kontora Glubokogo Bureniza, ("deep drilling office"—a Russian euphemism for the KGB,) for purposes of "identification," that every seventh or fifth or third person in it is a KGB spy—shall I believe him? Probably, I will, because this fits the logic of our life... And if immediately after him another guy comes and tells me that the previous one was a*n agent provacateu*r, and his version a lie profitable to Lubyanka yearning to bolster up faith in its omnipotence, which someone found to have been shaken—shall I believe him, too? I'm afraid that I will, because this also follows the same logic.
>
> So where were we living, and where do we continue to live? And what have they done to us?...

Clearly, "logic" —the foundation and framework of all meaningful language— is no longer a substantive concept. Without the capacity for logical connections, there can be no distinction between true and false, and with the breakdown of truth comes the loss of the ability to trust. All public bodies, including the Pedagogical Institute, were once officially administered by the KGB agent ordained to oversee all aspects of its functioning. Such officers no longer exist in Lithuania, but the void they have left behind is in many ways more intimidating. No longer is there a tangible menace: now, there is only the threat, hanging like poisonous smog, that any of one's colleagues might be working for the secret police. Even here at the Institute, life is tainted by this uncertainty: several professors have expressed private doubts about the loyalty of a given colleague.

It is this fear, this uncertainty that all Soviet citizens strike out against as they seek to free themselves from the grip of Moscow. This is what they flee as each successive republic declares itself independent of the authority of the Supreme Soviet. To be sure, they are fighting for freedom of travel and religion, and for full store shelves. But mostly, they are fighting for the freedom not to be afraid.

Will they succeed? Often it seems as if one guess is as good as another, but there are signs that Lithuania stands a better chance than many of the other republics.

For one, the people here have an extraordinary drive that fifty years of communist tyranny has done little to harm. One of the many forums in which this energy manifests itself is that of athletics.

Birkenau Requiem

They gather again, soundless in the sun-specked shade.
Gnarled canes part chest-high grass past vacant towers
that fringe these fields flecked indigo and ochre.
On a rain-rotted fence post hangs a widow's spray
of roses, stems threaded through coils of rusting wire.
A doe browses acorns amidst the brick decay:
edged in alder shade, the pond is still silted grey
with human ash, but the air above the smoke spire
of the crematorium is brushed blue and clean.
Barracks ranked in file protrude from patches of raw
soil like fresh-cut headstones, but blackened tracks lie
hidden in a wind-rippled mane of uncut green.
The trebling of a water-thrush spreads across
evening: they nod "it is well," and light slips from sky.

Poetry by Roy Kesey

If this tiny republic, with a population about one third as large as the city of Los Angeles, had been counted as an independent country in the 1988 Olympic Games, it would have ranked eleventh in the final medal count. Until their athletes withdrew in protest, they constituted half of the Soviet Olympic volleyball and basketball teams. And *one year* after the first cycling track was built in Lithuania in 1982, they produced the Soviet men's singles champion.

Another sign of rejuvenated national pride is the way in which the arts have flourished after five decades of repression. Many contemporary poets are re-discovering the rich textures of folk songs that date back thousands of years, and for the first time in half a century, young people are learning these songs as they seek to regain the birthright that until now has been withheld.

The people are reaching back in more tangible ways as well. The oak tree is a pagan symbol so deeply ingrained in the spirit of ancient Lithuania that the ubiquitous and powerful Catholic church has adopted it for Christianity. The massive trees were all but eradicated by the Soviet authorities, both as a source of state revenue, and, some would say, for the psychological repression of a deeply religious populace. However, oak saplings can now be seen in many public places as movements for replanting and preservation gather steam.

Of course, it will take far more than oak trees and volleyball for Lithuania to survive amid the smoking ruins of the Soviet empire. And it is the political arena that may prove to be Lithuania's hole card. As in every other republic, the neophyte legislature consists mainly of representatives whose only credential is a lack of past communist connections. However, a blessing was hidden within the economic atrophy caused by the recent military blockade : the pressure it generated was a fast lesson in *real politic* that will stand these young politicians in good stead in the years ahead.

Finally, there exists here an almost tribal loyalty that transcends personal interests and binds the culture in unity. This year, hundreds of young Lithuanian women rejected offers to attend the state-run colleges and universities. They did so to make more room for their male counterparts: college enrollment is at present the only way for Lithuanian men to legally avoid being drafted to serve in the Red Army.

The obstacles to Lithuania's success as a sovereign state are many and great. Their survival, the survival of every republic that seeks to become truly independent, will depend on their ability to do two things. First, they must establish a workable notion of truth that will allow people to trust one another. This can only be found in the continuity and grounding provided by their pre-occupation culture; in the religious, artistic, and nationalist traditions that still exist. Second, they must focus the energy and vision and even the anger of young men and women to start work on the infrastucture that has been eroding since Molotov-Ribbentrop. Only by such a synthesis of old and new, of youth and age, can the spectre of Soviet communism be put to rest. Only through this process can the ghost of Joseph Stalin be exorcised for good.

According to physicist Juras Banys, Lithuanians are willing to suffer whatever hardships will be necessary to succeed. He states, "Many Russians see the collapse of their country as immanent, and the only ones who might be able prevent this from happening—doctors, teachers, scientists—are looking for other places, mainly in the west, in which to build their lives. And I don't blame them. But Lithuanians are not leaving. Our old people remember what it was like to be free. And the young listen to the stories, and they believe. We are eager to rebuild."

POST SCRIPTUM

On January 13th, 1991, Red Army troops stationed in Vilnius opened fire with automatic weapons and mounted cannons. The unarmed Lithuanian civilians that had gathered to protect their television tower had no defense but their courage: bodies dropped like tenpins. The tower was seized. Radio Vilnius fell silent after one last plea for Western assistance. The delicate snow that sifted white through the winter air was stained scarlet where the victims had fallen.

At the time, the world's attention had been focused on the Middle East.

Fourteen Lithuanians were killed and dozens wounded in what the *Moscow News* immediately condemned as a "criminal act." Hundreds of people, including many members of the recently elected government, barricaded themselves into the parliament building, nervously fingering knives, clubs, and, with an irony not lost on the participants, Molotov cocktails. They have remained there ever since, a pitifully easy target should the tanks roll again.

Who is responsible for this travesty of *glasnost?* Soviet President Gorbachev disavowed foreknowledge of the attack, but his violent rhetoric in the Supreme Soviet indicates that he approved of the final result. And even his disavowal is suspect. Paratroopers had been dispatched to Vilnius back on January 7th, ostensibly to round up the Lithuanian men who had refused to comply with orders to join the Soviet military machine that has repressed their own people. Such a move could only have been directed by the central command in Moscow.

It appears that Gorbachev's fingerprints are all over the planning that predated the massacre by almost two months. It is rumored that the troops in Vilnius were not standard soldiers: they were the 'Black Berets,' an arm of the K.G.B. And Gorbachev's subsequent speeches and recent stifling of the free press leave no doubt but that the iron fist has removed its velvet glove. Even if the troops are removed at some future point, every freedom-minded republic now understands that order-by-violence is the favored strategy. The peaceful reformer who received the Nobel Peace Prize is dead, if indeed he ever existed at all.

It has become increasingly clear to Gorbachev and the rest of the world that the Baltic States, abducted into the Soviet Union some fifty years ago, can only be kept there at gunpoint. And other republics are at similar stages of the evolution toward regional autonomy. A week ago, Russian President Boris Yeltsin went so far as to make the mutinous assertion that Soviet soldiers must refuse further orders to fire on fellow Soviet citizens.

The urgency of the decision that faces the Bush administration grows with each passing day: they must decide either to perform a comprehensive ostrich act, ignoring this atrocity in the interest of keeping Gorbachev's chin above water, or to stand behind American claims to cherish and defend the right of each legitimate government to sovereignty that allegedly led us to stack half a million troops against Saddam Hussein.

Administration officials appear to be considering the latter option for the first time since Gorbachev's ascendency to power in 1985. Baltic leaders have been assured that the U.S.-U.S.S.R. summit planned for this spring has been shelved indefinitely, though Bush himself has been reluctant to link the disruption of plans to the events in Vilnius.

What are the arguments for continuing to support the present Soviet leadership in spite of their recent actions? What is actually at stake here? To be sure, Gorbachev's willingness to join the alliance against Saddam was instrumental in presenting a united front in preparation for the Gulf War, but his attempts as mid-war diplomacy were impotent as the U.S. dictated policy to both its allies and enemies.

The only remaining virtue of Gorbachev's ongoing leadership is the relative assurance it gives the West of a final stamp of approval on the two arms-reduction treaties recently completed. However, as noted in the January 19 *Economist,* the desire of any Soviet government to reduce the deficit that is throttling their economy is likely to push these deals through regardless of our stance on the Baltics.

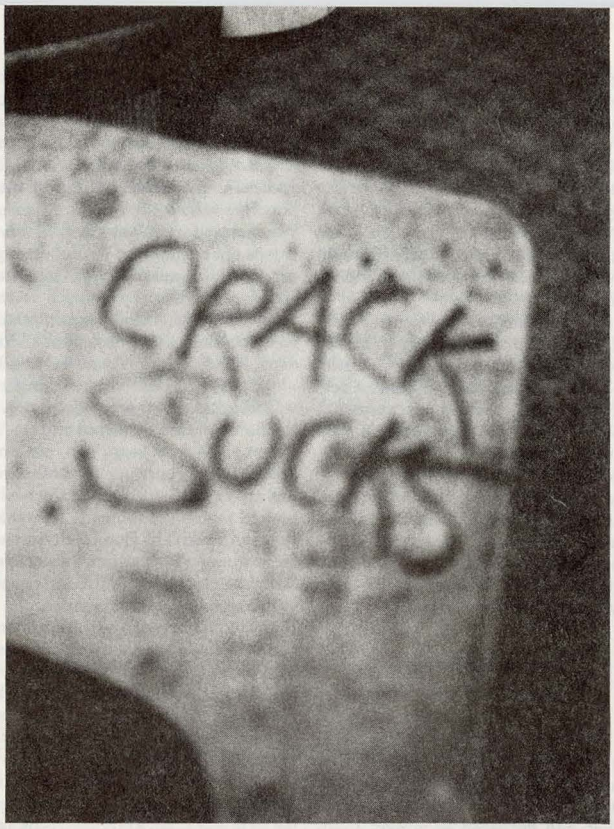
No one wants to see civil war, especially not in a country with a massive nuclear arsenal. And what are the other possibilities? A showdown between Boris Yeltsin and Mikhail Gorbachev is not long in coming. At present, the massive weight of the Soviet military is on Gorbachev's side. But three things must not be forgotten. First, the military is top-heavy in ethnic minorities who may be unwilling to fire on citizens of their respective republics, just as Soviet Muslim troops from Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan were reticent to fire on their religious brothers and sisters in Afghanistan. In fact, four eyewitnesses of the shootings in Vilnius told an *Economist* reporter that an officer who refused to fire on civilians at the television tower was shot by a fellow soldier, and the murder used as a pretext for the attack.

Of course, the dysfunction of minority troops would still leave an immense body of Russian soldiers in the Red Army. Which brings us to the second point: again, though much of the military leadership is still in the hands of the right-wing hard-liners to whom Gorbachev appears to be capitulating, it is the Russian footsoldiers who must be convinced to pull triggers. If Yeltsin is able to parlay his immense popularity in the Russian republic into a massive defection from the Soviet army to a newly-proposed Russian army, he will be in a position to ignore the central Soviet command, and to continue the economic and social reforms that Gorbachev allowed to begin.

Finally and most importantly, Yeltsin has already declared his allegiance to the leaders of the other republics. He has signed both a quadrilateral defense treaty with Belorussia, the Ukraine, and Kazakhstan, and a joint pledge of non-interference with each of the Baltic states.

In any event, the Lithuanian spirit is bloody, but not bowed. They will bury their dead and attend to their wounded. They will continue to march in protest, and they will protect themselves as best they can. Their fight for freedom is far from over.

And within the playing out of their destiny will be found the principles that *truly* dictate American foreign policy. Far more than any technological muscle-flexing in the Persian Gulf, our choice to abandon the republics whose right to independence we have always asserted, or to stand by them in spite of their lack of strategic oil reserves will serve as a mirror for the character of the United States in this final decade of the twentieth century.



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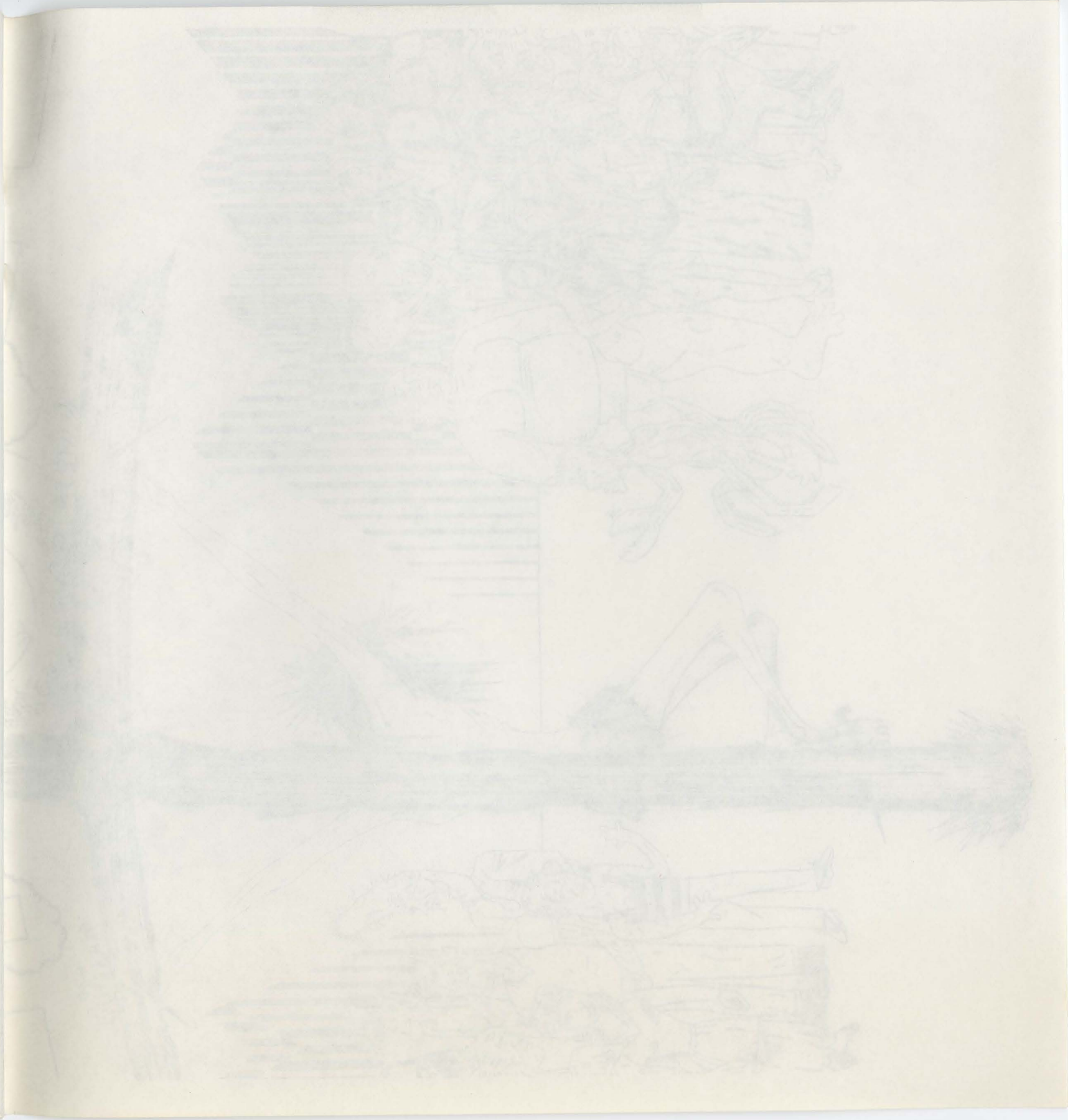

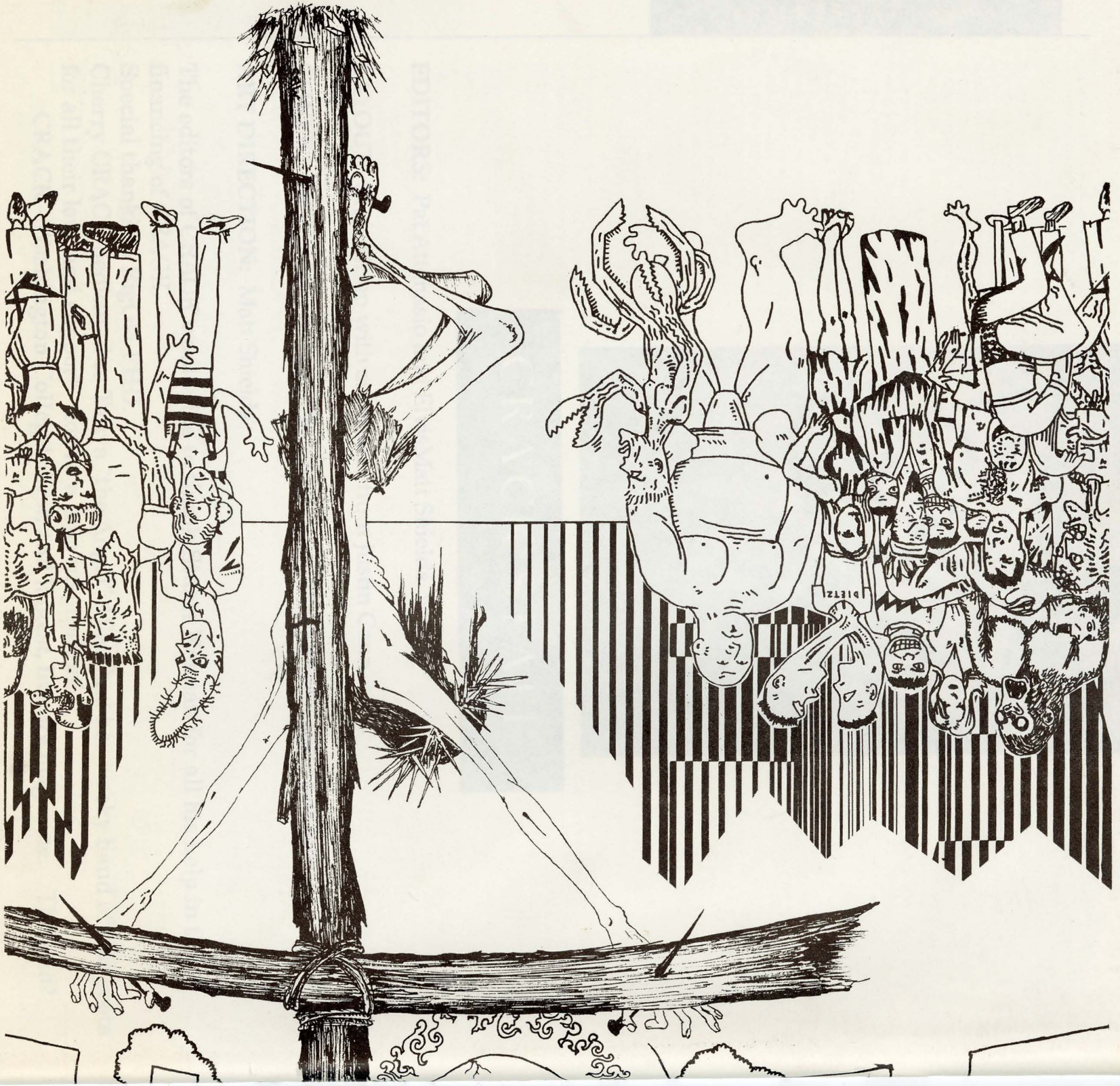
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